

ADAM

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JUNE, 1961

FACT • FICTION • HUMOR

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THE SILENT TIGER
—page 30



ADAM

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The Comeback

I was sure this was the man who had killed my father. If I could prove it I'd be made . . . and his daughter ruined.

IT was my last chance and Hammerstein, the Chief Editor, made damn' sure I knew it.

"Marlowe," he told me in a voice hard enough to crack a rock. "I've carried you for three years now and I'm tired of it! You're not a top feature-writer now. You can't trade on that any longer. One more binge and you're through for good."

I was still sick and shaking from my last bout with the bottle. They'd hospitalised me. It had really scared the hell out of me. I'd had green dogs in my bed. I was willing to eat humble pie right now. I needed a job, preferably my old job on the paper. The AA people had recommended I find something I could really get my teeth into. Without some definite purpose I was finished.

I was going to make a comeback, climb all the way back up the ladder to the top where I'd been sitting before the affair with Wilma had pushed me off.

My first assignment was pretty menial and discouraging. I was to go 70 miles down the coast to a fishing town and get a story about the sand bar in the river estuary there. The bar had grounded or capsized more than a dozen trawlers during the last seven months. It had claimed three boats in the last 10 days so that made it news. Writing it up would be little more than stringing the facts together.

"Short of Juniors, Chief?" I couldn't help being sarcastic.

"No — If you leave right away you ought to be back by tonight. We'll hold the piece for the weekend papers. Let's see if you've still got the old touch, Marlowe."

I was suddenly enthusiastic about the job.

"Listen, Chief. Suppose I go out in a trawler myself? I could do an 'It-happened-to-me' piece on it, Chief. Give it a real personal touch. If we get grounded so much the better."

"It might turn head over kettle," he warned.

"Well, I can swim a bit. What d'you say? I need two days, Chief. Just two days!"

He stared at me silently for a long minute. "A man's a mug for sticking his neck out — okay! Two days! No more!"

The fisherman whose trawler had been capsized the day before was named Lambert, a sunburned young husky with a crewcut and a ready smile. I interviewed him at the home of Vern Larsen, another fisherman with whom Lambert stayed. Lambert was engaged to Larsen's daughter, Fay, a blue-eyed, taut-bodied, flaxen-haired smiling beauty who worked on her father's trawler.

But it wasn't Fay or Lambert who interested me so much as Larsen himself. He was an average-sized bloke in his early 50's with cropped white hair and clear blue eyes. There was a deep scar slanting from under his right ear, down into the rollneck of his fish-smelling sweater. This scar and a mannerism — scratching the back of his leathery neck, bringing the salt-toughened fingers around, up and over the left ear, across the cheek and finally wiping over the top of the axblade nose — started me thinking.

Twenty years ago I'd seen a man with a heavily-bandaged neck use that same mannerism. It had been in the Perth Criminal Court. The man was on trial for murder. But his name wasn't Larsen and he wasn't a fisherman.

He was Doctor Stuart Ericson, father of a two-year-old girl with blonde curls and round blue eyes. He was also the slayer of his wife's lover. Before he'd died with Ericson's bullet in him, the lover had managed to jab a broken bottle into the doctor's neck. After the shootings, he'd calmly bandaged his neck and driven seven miles to deliver a six-pound baby.

The police thought they had him cold but at the last minute, on the stand, his wife had refused to give evidence against him. The prosecution had no case without her testimony and they couldn't force her to give it. The case against Ericson collapsed. He was discharged through lack of evidence. It caused a nation-wide sensation at the time. Ericson claimed all along he was innocent, that he'd been miles away at the time of the shootings and had injured his neck in a minor motor accident. But everyone knew he'd done the shootings. It just

couldn't be proved against him.

He caused another sensation right after the trial by disappearing and taking his two-year-old daughter with him. He apparently vanished from the face of the earth. No one had seen or heard of him since.

I remembered these happenings well although I'd only been a 16-year-old cub at the time. I had reason to remember — Mrs. Ericson's lover had also been my father.

This fisherman with his scarred, calloused hands and leathery skin, in no way resembled the dapper Doctor Ericson. My old man had been a bit of a waster, hadn't lived with my mother for years before the Ericson affair. There was no love lost between us. But now, facing the man I believed to be his killer, I realised how the story could give me a short-cut back to the top.

The thought brought me out in a cold sweat . . .

"Just a little more background, Mr. Larsen," I said, notebook poised, the three of them sitting stiffly in the parlor of the weatherboard house. "Where did you originally come from?"

Larsen's eyes crackled at me. "Wait a minute now, Mr. Marlowe — I thought it was Jim's story you wanted."

"Well, you've just been telling me your experiences with the bar over the years, Mr. Larsen. I'd like to include them in the article . . . You've been a fisherman all your life?" My mouth was dry, my body tense.

"For 40 years, anyway. "He relaxed a bit, thinking he had me off the subject of where he'd come from. He had his story off pat. "I've fished everything from 'cوتا to whales."

"Whales, too, eh? — where'd you hunt them? Off West Australia?"

"Why the hell WA?" he asked in such a curt tone that both Fay and Lambert frowned at him puzzledly.

"Well, not too long back that was Australia's only decent whaling ground. I thought you were referring to your younger days."

"I was," he said more quietly, mollified at my simple explanation. But I knew now he was touchy about references to West Aussie. "But I hunted in the Antarctic, out of Hobart."

"Tassie, eh? Nice place. Your home State?"

(Continued on page 51)



He was alone in the immensity of wild Africa at night . . . man-eaters prowling and hunting for food . . . He remembered the unfinished warning: "It's dangerous because . . .!"



THEY

ALAN Johnson had been forced to argue with his professional hunter, Harry Walker, about his wish to spend a night alone, except for his gun-bearer, Mafeking, in a zareba on the veldt. The older man, infinitely more experienced, had listened quietly, interjecting a word of protest now and then. In the end he had reluctantly agreed, sensing, perhaps, his client's need to prove to himself that he could go it alone.

"This is good game country," Harry had remarked. "You'll see things, all right. But it's dangerous because . . ." The words had trailed off and Harry had shrugged his shoulders, giving up the argument.

Crouched tense and excited that night on the blanket that Mafeking had laid on the ground in the centre of the barricade of thorn bushes which encircled the two men, Alan wondered why Harry had not finished his last sentence.

Without warning, dry leaves rustled beyond the barricade. There was the scuffling sound of feet on the bare ground outside.

"Strong-wan." The word was spoken with contempt and loathing.

Hyenas, were they? He should have guessed. But not knowing and not guessing made Alan realise how much he had to learn about hunting on the veldt of Africa. Unless he could learn to go it alone, away from the protecting rifle and experience of his teacher; to read and interpret sounds and tracks; to stand against the charge of furious animals, without the comforting knowledge that no other faster and better shot was ready beside him, he knew that he could never honestly claim to be a big-game hunter.

The zareba was only two miles from the camp which had been pitched beneath the grotesquely swollen limbs of a monstrous baobab tree. To Alan, listening in the pitch blackness, the camp seemed almost in another world.

Low, horrid, voracious sounds flowed from the area around the bait. The hyenas slobbered and whined and Alan could hear them chewing on meat and hide and pulling at the carcass and cracking bones with their powerful jaws. All that he could see were darker, more solid blobs of blackness scuttling wraithlike in the night.

Bending, Alan touched Mafeking and reached for the torch. Sensing what Alan wanted, Mafeking placed the light in his hand, whispering, "Not shoot. Not shoot."

KILL BY NIGHT

Aiming the light through the port, Alan clicked on the flash. As the silent, probing beam lit up the striped body of the zebra, ugly, heavy heads turned to face it. The broad, pushed-in muzzles of the hyenas dripped with blood, the viscous fluid from the entrails at which they had been tearing. A chorus of angry growls and snarls greeted the light.

Alan clicked off the flash. As he handed it back to Mafeking the hyenas burst into their demoniac laughter.

Abruptly all sounds ceased. Though he could not see, Alan knew the hyenas had melted away. Utter and complete silence descended on the veldt and the zareba. He knew there must be a reason for the abrupt retreat of the scavengers. Was some more powerful animal arriving? Faintly, as though from a great distance, he heard Mafeking's breath hiss as he drew air into his lungs.

Alan reached for the rifle. As he lifted it the thorns rattled gently and he felt Mafeking lay a restraining hand on his knee and pressed it as if in warning. So faint that he wasn't sure the sound was not a figment of his imagination, Alan heard the rustle of leaves and the soft scrape of a dry branch against a furry body. A low growl broke from the night only a few feet from the zareba. A cold shiver ran over Alan and his grip on his rifle tightened so that his knuckles ached.

For what seemed an eternity there were no further sounds. Then the chain holding down the zebra rattled. Alan heard an animal bite into the bait and the chain rattled again as whatever it was that was feeding tugged at the carcass and ripped out a gory chunk of flesh. There was a chomping sound and then a sort of guzzling gurgle as the feeding animal bolted down the meat.

Mafeking leaned forward and whispered close into Alan's ear.

"Serrowe!" Leopard!

Excitement surged through Alan. He had never shot a leopard.

Slowly, with infinite caution, Alan got to one knee so that he was facing the opening in the thorns. Mafeking, knowing from long experience what was expected, rose also and placed himself behind Alan and raised the torch so that it pointed out the opening from behind and over Alan's right shoulder.

Alan clicked his tongue. Mafeking pushed the button of the flash and a beam of white, brilliant light

streamed from the zareba and illuminated the bait. The black and white stripes of the zebra shone sharp and clear.

The leopard was lying by the hindquarters. In the beam the black rosettes stood out sharp and clean against the orange body. Its long, thick tail lay stretched on the ground, its tip twitching nervously as the leopard turned its round head and glared at the zareba. The burning glow in its eyes pulsed as its anger at the interruption of its meal intensified. The hard, black edges of its lips curled, showing the powerful teeth streaked red with blood. The short, stiff hairs growing on top of its broad, pushed-in muzzle were smeared with blood. A throaty growl rumbled from its half-open mouth.

As Alan pulled the front sight down in the "U" of the rear sight so that just the fine point showed, he saw the muscles in the leopard's hindquarters ripple and tense and knew that it was about to spring. Calm now that he was facing rather than guessing about his adversary, Alan squeezed, taking up the slight slack in the trigger.

There was a streak of orange fire. The report of the powerful rifle crashed out of the zareba and rolled across the veldt.

For a brief moment, while the hunters stared from the zareba, the leopard lay motionless as if it had neither heard nor felt the shot. Then blood rushed from its mouth, its head sank to the ground and the leopard rolled on to its side, its hind legs twitching, then straightening as if in a mighty stretch. Its lean flanks heaved as a last, swooshing breath left its body and its savage spirit departed.

Mafeking let out a pleased whoop of pleasure and Alan, turning with a grin on his face, offered his hand and the two shook, congratulating each other.

Mafeking pushed out the thick thorn bush which had been used to close the entrance to the zareba. Alan handed him the torch and held his rifle in his right hand. As they stepped from the safety of the barricade, Mafeking swung the beam of the flash on to the veldt. The bulky form of a hyena loomed in the light and then the animal galloped away. Eyes, in pairs, glowed and shone in the beam as the native rapidly played it about.

When he grasped a forepaw and tried to hoist the leopard, with Mafeking raising the hindquarters, Alan found the animal heavier than

expected. The paw slipped through his hand and he quickly rubbed his palm in the dirt to get a better grip, and heaved. Struggling, bouncing the carcass against the ground, the two men hustled to lug the leopard to safety. Around them the hyenas pressed in closer and their growls deepened. Savage, choking snarls burst from the night as Mafeking tried to play the light about while hauling on the leopard. With only one hand free, Alan could not use his rifle.

With a gasp of relief Alan crowded into the zareba, the thorns tearing at his arms and legs, and yanked to bring the leopard in. Mafeking stumbled after and quickly pulled the thorn bush back into place to close the entrance.

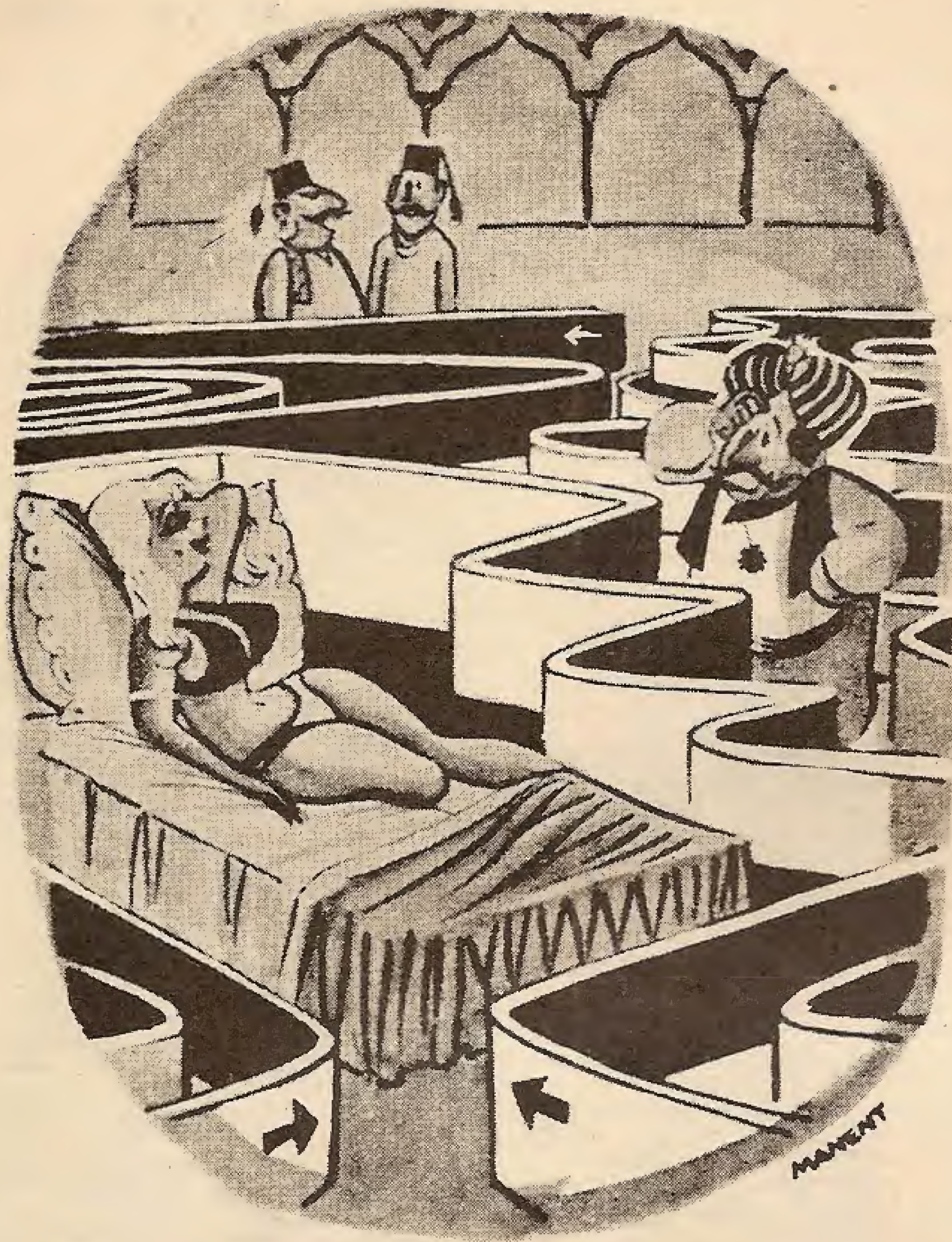
Comparatively safe once more, Alan turned the light on his kill. The leopard was a male, long and heavy, and its worn, rather blunt canine teeth told that it was old. Examining the body to find his bullet hole, Alan thought of the hundreds of antelopes and goats and dogs which the leopard must have killed during its life. It had lived its life to its fullest savagery, marauding and killing whenever in the mood. Alan ran his hands possessively over the bright short fur.

Reaching for the thermos flask Harry had thoughtfully filled for him in camp, he poured two cups of strong, sweet tea. As they drank he clicked off the flash, and within minutes they heard the hyenas snarling and feeding on the zebra.

Alan unrolled a blanket and, spreading a corner of it over the leopard, lay down, resting his head on the body as a pillow and pulling the rest of the blanket over himself and settled down to doze.

Then silence awakened him. It was a moment before he realised where he was and why he was awake. The half-moon was rising and a ghostly, wan light illuminated the veldt. Every bush and every tall tree cast a long black shadow on the ground. Mafeking was sitting up with his blanket still draped around his shoulders. The chill in the air had increased, but it wasn't the fact that his legs and arms were cold which had awakened Alan.

Mafeking saw that his employer was awake. Turning his dark face toward the hunter, he held his finger against his lips, enjoining silence. His gesture could only mean that some animal, some dangerous animal, was very close. Alan felt the perspiration sprout in his armpits and trickle down his ribs be-



"There's always one who likes to play hard-to-get."

neath his shirt. His heart began to thump wildly and his mouth dried. Had the lions come, he wondered? If they had, were they so near that Mafeking dared scarcely move?

From a short distance, perhaps 100 yards, a branch was suddenly torn from a tree with a ripping, tearing crash. Alan heard it hit the ground. Only one animal on the veldt can tear limbs from a tree. An elephant!

Was the elephant alone, or was there a herd with it? No wonder the hyenas had gone. All animals, though some act reluctantly, give way before the elephant.

Like every hunter, Alan had an enormous respect for elephants. He knew them to be temperamental animals which could be stampeded by a sudden noise or an unexpected smell, but also animals which could, under the same conditions, react entirely differently to a noise or a scent with a terrible charge of determination and rage.

Another branch was torn from a tree. Closer this time. The elephant, or elephants, were moving slowly across the veldt, feeding as they shuffled along.

Then he heard the sound to which Mafeking had been listening. The curious, continuous rumblings of an elephant's stomach. Fed hundreds of pounds of partly chewed roots and bark and leaves and grass, the stomachs of elephants generate great quantities of gas and this tumbles and grumbles constantly. Listening above the pounding of his heart, Alan heard, and knew that several elephants were coming closer and closer to where he and Mafeking crouched behind the puny, ineffective barricade of thorns.

In the faint light Alan saw Mafeking raise his arm and point. Cautiously, Alan got to his knees and turning on the blanket looked over the thorns. For a moment he saw nothing unusual. Then the enormous bulk of an elephant emerged from the shadows and crossed through the thin half-light to another tree. Alan saw its trunk swing upward, exploring the branches. There was a crash as the mighty beast stepped backward and ripped a branch from the tree. Beyond it Alan could see the dark, ghostly shapes of other elephants.

In the uncertain light, as the elephants passed to and fro, it was

impossible to count them. But it was not a large herd. Alan guessed the number at around a dozen or 15 adults and half-grown animals. As he watched them fearfully he saw the moonlight play along the curving tusks, and when an elephant stepped from beneath a tree the thin light turned its ridgy back a lightish grey. Flapping their enormous ears, rumbling, feeding, the elephants drew closer and closer.

His eyes riveted on the great animals, Alan watched every move. He noticed a calf, about three and a half feet high, hurrying back and forth around its huge mother and often scurrying between her legs and under her stomach. It wasn't more than 40 yards away.

On one of its scampering forays, the little elephant approached quite close to the zareba. For a short time it stood, its young ears spread, listening. Alan held his breath, praying that it would turn and go back to its mother. Instead, its curiosity got the better of it. Cautiously it approached the odd heap of thorny bushes which concealed the two hunters.

It came nearer and nearer. Alan hardly dared to breathe as the baby elephant came to the thorn barricade and began to explore it with its little trunk. The inquisitive, delicate tip probed among the thorns. Alan knew it must be scenting them, but the smell of man apparently did not frighten it. He tore his gaze from the youngster to look at the big elephants. They were moving along slowly, 30 to 40 yards distant.

The little elephant tugged tentatively at the thorn bushes forming the zareba. The bush came loose and tumbled to the ground. The baby backed away, a low, rather squeakish rumble sounding from its small throat. Alan's heart flipped and stood still. His eyes flew to the huge elephants. He saw one which he guessed to be the mother of the youngster, turn and throw out her great ears and stand listening. She had heard her baby and stood instantly ready to charge to its assistance. Several of the other enormous animals stood still, listening.

Alan heard Mafeking's breath whistle between his clenched teeth. Would the mother elephant come to investigate what had disturbed her child? If she did, what would be their chance of escaping alive from her furious anger at discovering humans so close? A cold fear such as he had never known before gripped Alan and he stood frozen in anticipation.

The youngster tossed the bush aside with its trunk and came closer, butting against the barricade, its small trunk, delicate and inquisitive, wriggled within a foot of Alan's body. Rigid, he watched the tip expand and contract as the youngster absorbed the smell of his body. He was more frightened than if the probing, breathing trunk had been the writhing body of a deadly poisonous snake. At any moment the young elephant might trumpet a warning and bring the herd rushing to its rescue. In the midst of his terror, Alan remembered Harry's

unfinished remark. "It is dangerous because . . ." Now he knew what had worried the experienced hunter.

Apparently satisfied with its explorations, the little elephant backed away from the zareba. Alan heard Mafeking let out his pent-up breath in a long, low sigh. As the youngster turned, heading back to its mother, Alan's body went slack.

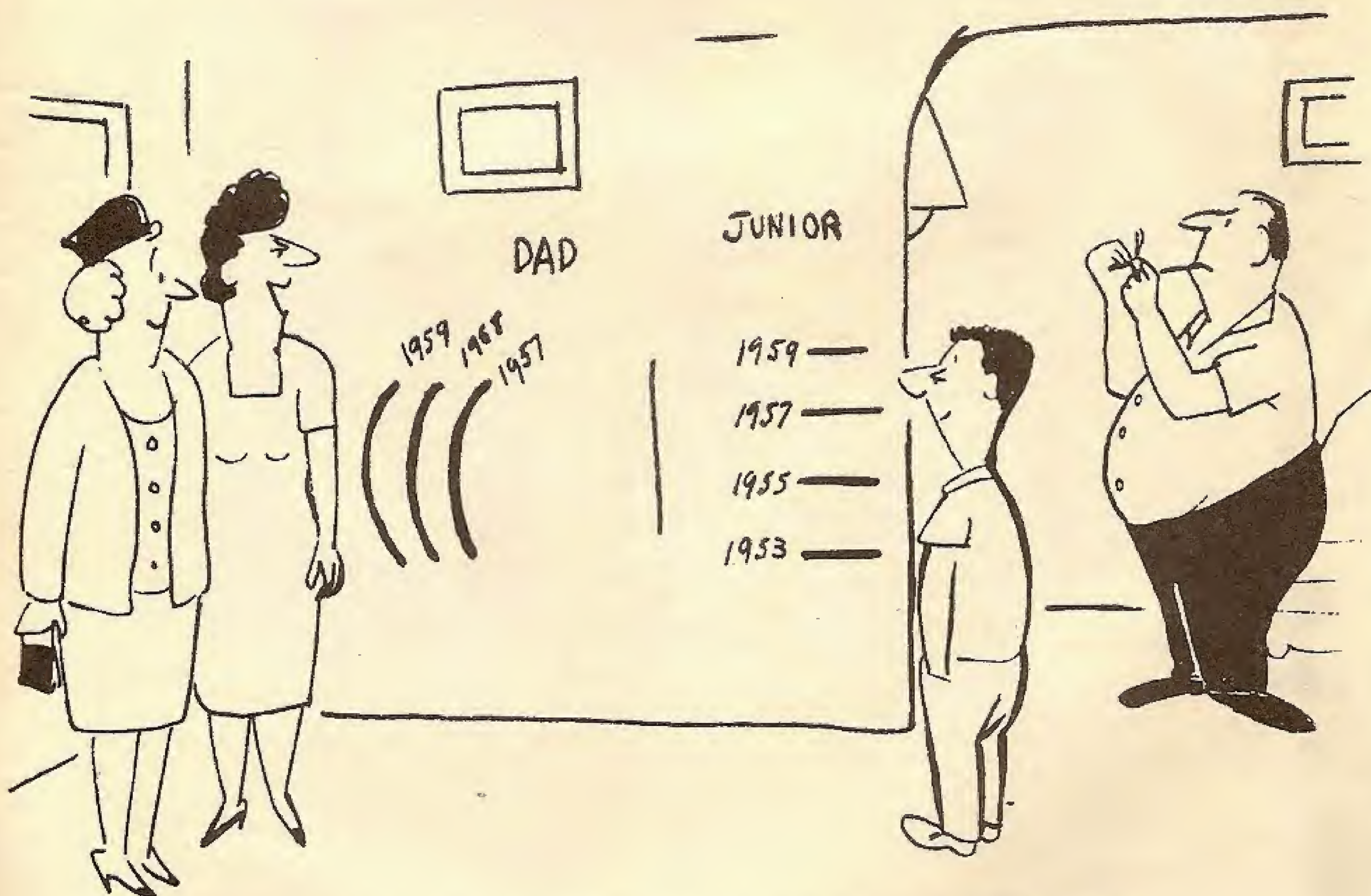
The youngster joined its mother and disappeared beneath her. The enormous creatures, standing ten-and-a-half to eleven feet at the shoulders, passed slowly across the ghostly veldt. The rumblings of their stomachs faded into the night. For perhaps a quarter of an hour Alan heard the occasional ripping crash of a branch being torn from a tree, then silence closed over the veldt. The thin light illuminated the striped carcass of the zebra and the shadows from the trees shortened. The stars twinkled hard and serene far overhead. A long distance away a hyena whooped dismally.

Alan and his gunbearer were alone in the midst of the veldt. Alan fished out his watch and looked at it. Another hour and dawn would lighten the sky to the east. The night was almost gone. Sinking to his knees he reached for the flask of tea and pouring two cups turned and ran his left hand over the fur of the leopard, now stiff and cold.

The skin, tanned and lying on the floor of his game room at home would, he knew, bring back memories and sensations which he would never be able to communicate to others. He had lived through a night the memories and emotions of which would always be for him and for Mafeking alone. •

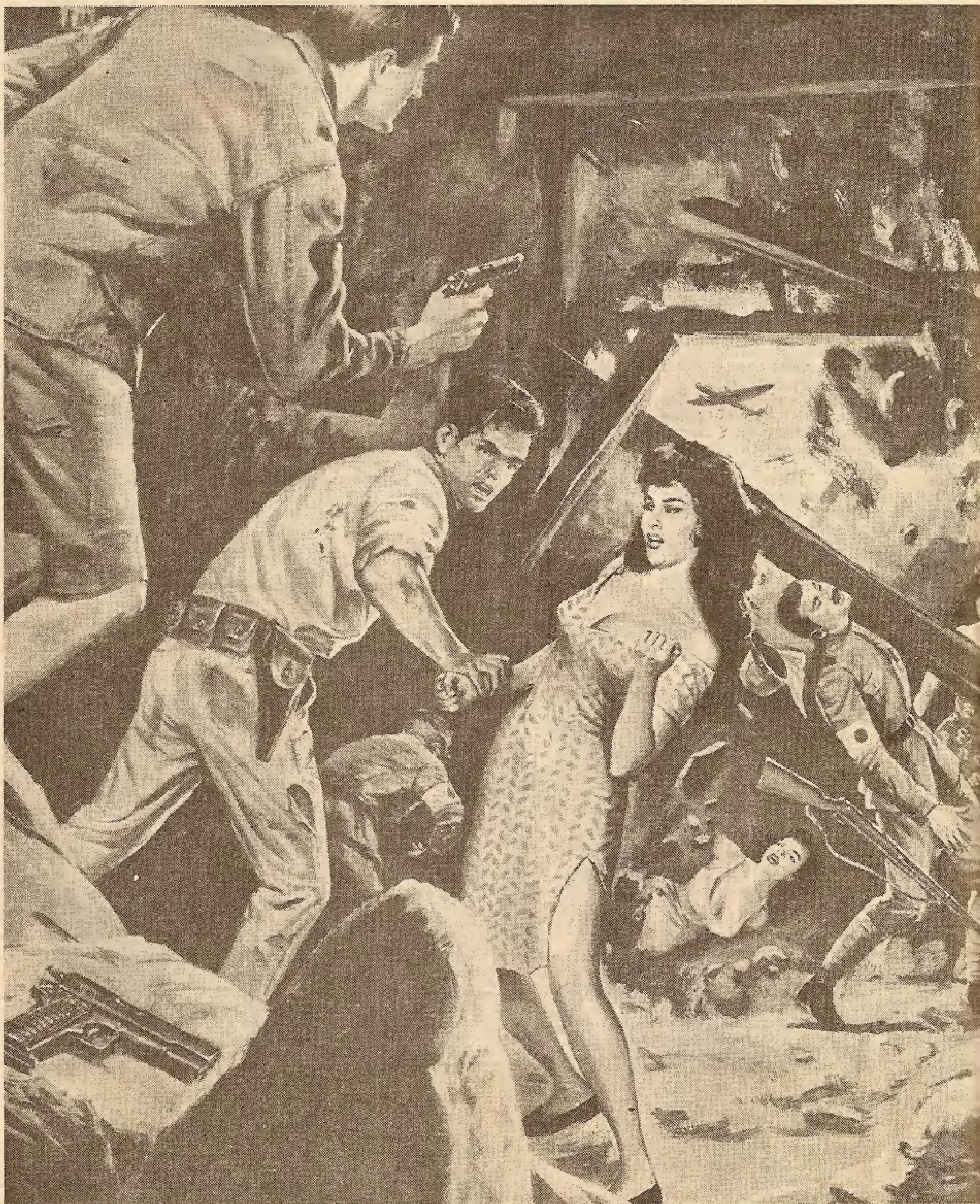


"Through with that?"



"Oh, they're both growing by leaps and bounds since you were here last."

[Faint vertical bleed-through from the reverse side]



—THERE'S NO MORE AIR!

A PITCH black night. The three men edged their way carefully along the narrow ledge just below the top of the cliff. About 50 yards on, they reached a broad shelf covered with a tangle of jungle growth and cogon grass.

Elston Becker unstrapped the bulky transceiver from his back and slipped it to the grass. The set was early World War II vintage, in the SCR series, truly portable only on the back of a mule. Becker unhinged its flap, ran out the steel antenna and camouflaged it behind a clump of thick bushes. When his routine test checked out, he squatted back on his heels and glanced at his two companions.

Lieutenant Roy Wilson, his Aussie sidekick, was dumping dirt and pebbles out of a shoe, hunched over his bald patch glowed. Ramon Cortino, the Filipino guide, grinned and pointed to the blacked-out city of Davao below them.

"Yeah," Becker nodded.

That was all he had to say. They knew what they had to do. For almost three years they'd worked together as Allied coast watchers on Mindanao, one of the southernmost islands in the Philippines. The job: to spot and report Japanese naval and shipping activities in the Philippine Sea. They were to stay together — a long time.

Becker, 28, was a civilian. He'd come to the Philippines fresh out of the Colorado School of Mines, on a two-year contract with the Luzon Mineral Corporation to explore for manganese and lead deposits in the Mindanao mountains. When the Japanese attacked Clark Air Field and cut off Mindanao, Becker was recruited by the Allies as a coast watcher.

Roy Wilson, 43, owned a copra plantation on the island. He'd been commissioned a lieutenant in the Australian Army. Ramon Cortino had been Wilson's foreman.

On December 10, 1944, the three were ordered to close up on the port city of Davao and report conditions relevant to the scheduled Allied invasion. Now, well inside the enemy perimeter, Becker pointed to the path heading down the face of the cliff.

"Pick a point down there, Ramon," he said softly.

Cortino nodded and moved off silently.

"I'll take the topside watch," said Wilson, grumbling. He shook his head. "I don't like this, Ellie. We're coast watchers, not b..... commandos."

Becker shrugged and Wilson climbed up to take his point at the top of the cliff. A thin fog rolled in from the sea. It was chilly. Becker pulled a blanket from his pack and wrapped it around his shoulders, but it didn't stop the wet, pre-dawn air from knifing through him.

Just after 5 am, he opened his code book and enciphered his first message. From the high cliff, using binoculars, he could see Davao's docks — all destroyed by B-17 bombing attacks. Close to shore were the battered hulls of five partially sunk Japanese transports. On a two-lane dirt road to the west of town, the gaunt frames of clobbered Japanese trucks stuck up out of ditches. About 15 concrete pillboxes remained undamaged on the beach. Barbed wire and steel anti-tank posts — still intact.

Then, just below his immediate position, Becker observed a small-gauge railroad track that ran into the face of the cliff. The area surrounding it had been bombed heavily. Deep craters pocked the ground and at two or three points the rails were torn and twisted.

No one stirred in Davao itself. The town seemed almost deserted. Becker tapped out his report and the hard metallic sound of the key seemed dangerously loud. He repeated twice and when he signed off, Ramon, crouching low, hurried up the path.

"There's cave down below," the Filipino said, shivering. "I'm cold. You?"

Becker's fingers were so numbed by the cold that he was having trouble keying. He nodded. "Let's get in it," he said. "Good place to sit it out when the B-17's come in, anyway. Pick up Wilson."

By the time the two returned, Becker had buried his transceiver in the brush. Cortino led them down the cliff side. At the bottom, six small handcarts were lying on their sides at the mouth of the cave.

The track actually ran into this cave, the entrance to which had been cleared by men obviously no longer there.

Becker darted across the clearing, ran inside the cave and disappeared. A moment later, he peered out and waved the other two on.

They entered a narrow tunnel. Cortino snapped on his flashlight. The tunnel curved sharply and then opened into a huge vaulted chamber. Narrow tunnels branched off from this main central room. Stacked up in piles were thousands of wooden cartons and burlap bags.

Wilson picked up a crowbar and pried open a carton. It was filled with cans of tuna fish. They opened other boxes at random and found a variety of vegetables and meats. The bags were filled with rice.

"There's enough flamin' chow in here to feed the whole city of Davao for a year," Wilson exclaimed.

"I don't like this," Cortino whispered. "Why is there no guard?"

"Hell, Ramon," Becker explained. "With those tracks torn up, they can't move the stuff out too easy."

The sun, climbing over the horizon, cast thin fingers of light into the opening of the cave. Becker took out a small packet of cigarettes and passed them out. While he rummaged in his pocket for a match, a gun echoed in the distance. It boomed out dully three times in rapid fire.

"An air raid alert," said Cortino.

Becker grinned. "Yeah. And we're a helluva lot better off in here than hanging on the side of a cliff when those fly boys start flipping their bombs around."

He was about to continue when they heard, loud, excited voices at the tunnel entrance — Japanese voices.

"Douse that light!" Becker whispered, pulling the two men behind a stack of cartons. The cave was plunged into absolute darkness. They heard the Japanese march inside — then silence, a flashing of torch light, and dancing shadows flickered across the rough walls. The Japanese walked into a room off the main chamber. In a moment, a generator coughed and whirred into action. Lights came on.

The Japanese returned and,

On December 10, 1944, three coastwatchers, two Japanese and six school-girls were buried by bombs in a Mindanao cave. Here, for the first time, are the incredible details of their shocking 481-day ordeal.



"I wonder where he gets his inspiration?"

squatting on their heels, talked in their harsh, explosive language. There were two of them. A few minutes later, an elderly couple rushed into the cave. They panted for breath and began speaking Tagalog. They were pleased by this latest Allied bombing raid.

Maybe in a few weeks," the old man crowed, "we will be liberated."

Becker saw the taller of the Japanese stalk up to the old man and, without warning, slap the old Filipino to the ground.

"Nippon," he barked, "will still rule here next year to teach you scum how to behave. As for right now . . ."

While the Japanese was screaming threats at the old man, other voices were heard. He ceased his barrage as the high-pitched voices came closer into the cave. Peering from behind his shield of cartons, Becker could see six young girls, dressed in peasant blouses and short blue serge skirts, enter the cave. From the way the Japanese greeted them, it was obvious they had taken shelter in the cave during other raids. Their skirts and blouses were all alike and Becker figured they must be school girls boarding close by.

"We'll have the whole damned town in here," Wilson growled under his breath to Becker.

Nervous and excited by the raid, the girls jabbered in Tagalog. Then the big guns boomed out in a heavy anti-aircraft barrage. The drone of the bombers grew louder, drowning out all sounds but the roar of their explosions.

"Hell!" Cortino muttered. "Japanese catch hell today." But no one heard him.

The first wave of planes passed overhead. Then the second squadron struck with such crescendo that the earth shook under the impact. Hunks of dirt and stone fell from the arched roof of the cave. Then the bombs loomed nearer. A tremendous roar echoed through the cave as a bomb struck the side of the cliff directly above the entrance. The elderly Filipinos, shrieking hysterically, ran to escape. As they reached the entrance, the cave let go in a mighty belch — limestone formations shattered and rolled with boulders and rubble to a crashing halt. A final scream pierced the air and the Filipinos were gone — crushed beneath the avalanche.

A pause — no one dared move. And again the stone poured down the face of the mountain. Clouds of dust exploded inside the cave, dimming the lights. Something ran across Becker's hand as he crouched on the floor — a rat — a terrified rat was scurrying for safety. The

landslide ceased.

"My God!" groaned Wilson. "We are buried alive!"

As soon as the earth settled, the two Japanese who had been sprawled on the ground, ran to what 10 minutes before had been the cave's entrance. They clawed and kicked at the rubble in a futile attempt to break their way out. They cursed and grunted as their fingers bled. It was useless.

"Listen," whispered Becker, "We are stuck in here. While we've got the chance, let's take those boys by surprise."

The two Japanese soldiers had left their rifles leaning against the stone wall. The girls, huddled together, were whimpering and moaning. The Japanese were still digging away frantically. Becker drew his .45 automatic.

"You guys grab the rifles," Becker ordered. "I'll take care of Tojo's boys."

Stepping out of their hiding places behind the cartons, they quickly moved down toward the entrance. Wilson and Cortino picked up the rifles while Becker headed into the tunnel. The Japanese turned around slowly and stared at him in shocked surprise. Becker waved them back into the main supply room where the girls, still huddled together, suddenly looked very happy.

"Is there another way out of this cave?" Becker asked. The taller of the two Japanese shook his head. He looked at the girls — they all nodded no. "Okay. Then let's face it. For us, the war's over." Becker turned to Wilson. "Smash up the guns."

"Do you think that's wise?" Wilson asked with a worried frown.

"We don't have much choice unless you want to shoot these monkeys now."

Without a word, the Aussie ejected the cartridges. He picked up the crow bar and banged the barrels and firing mechanism, bending them beyond repair.

The taller Japanese, with a captain's insignia on his uniform, glared at them arrogantly and sneered. "You save your sidearm."

Becker tossed it to Wilson. "Break it up, Roy." Wilson hesitated and Becker added quickly. "Break it up. Until we get out of here, we'll live together by law, not by force."

Three sharp blows of the crow bar destroyed the revolver. The girls, gaining confidence from the presence of Becker, Wilson and Cortino, started talking. They seemed more relaxed, perhaps believing they'd be rescued.

Carmen Fernandez, a tall, willowy girl with rich auburn hair, came up to Becker and shook his hand. "That was a decent thing, destroying the guns," she said. The other girls murmured their approval.

The Japanese captain, named Ikari, suddenly barked out an order. "You are my prisoners! You will take my orders!"

Becker threw back his head and laughed. "We're all prisoners. And no one gives orders."

Captain Ikari narrowed his eyes, then turned his back on Becker and began talking to his countryman.

The tension broke for the time being, and there was no further issue made of who was whose prisoner.

But Cortino showed his fear. "Becker — what we going to do? How we gonna breathe? We'll suffocate!"

Becker said shortly, "You'll frighten the others. There's enough air. Look there are many tunnels. Stop worrying."

On December 12, Becker opened his small notebook and made the first entry in his diary.

"Have started explorations of cave. Made way through passage-way off main chamber. Walked 15 yards when walls started closing in on me. All seemed suddenly compressed. Felt much colder and damp — very damp. Corridor got darker. Slackened my pace — just in time. Realised I was walking a deep chasm. Large drops of water dripped on my head. I flashed my light above me. Amazing. Tunnel encased very delicate spectacle: white, pink, lavender-tinted limestone tapestries; fluted columns, cornices, canopies and terraces. Magical. Could go no farther, but decided to go back next with ropes and descend into the chasm.

"Explored other tunnels.

"Tested air with crude torch. At end of northeast tunnel, strong draft pulled out smoke. Found tiny crevices in the rock, but none large enough for any hope of escape. Appears we are trapped.

"Generator in good shape and plentiful supply of petrol. Food no problem. Underground stream runs through one of large chambers. Two Japanese unco-operative and arrogant. Six school-girls sweet and still hopeful of rescue or escape. Wilson, Cortino and self have begun clearing away rubble at entrance. Japanese still insist we are their prisoners, but have made no effort to add cave to Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Captain Ikari is a cold, calculating character. Will have to be watched. Sergeant Tan-



"Would you mind making that out to the church instead of to just God?"

aka is built like proverbial out-house and isn't too bright."

On December 13, Becker went back to the chasm with Wilson. They had found some heavy rope and secured it with a spike and

loop, thereby devising a make-shift piton. Becker, rope around his waist, inched his way down the steep jagged rock. Wilson waited above on the slippery ledge, ready to pull Becker back up if anything went wrong. Wilson prayed for nothing to go wrong because he knew he could never get Becker back up again.

Down the shaft Becker went, carefully placing each foot in a niche, sliding along at a steady pace. He couldn't linger for more than a second for fear of dislodging a stone. Some felt loose as his feet grazed them—they had already been loosened from the force of water hitting them for years.

As he descended, he noticed small catholes under some of the rocks. Mosquitoes and small bugs bit into his flesh. He tossed his head back and forth trying to shoo them off. They kept coming at him, but he continued moving down. At least there was no carbonic acid gas apparent. They had been afraid of that.

He was nearing bottom and could see the tiny blind fish swimming below him, and water rats darting about. The rats looked fierce but Becker had no time to think about them. He had to find a way out — if there was one.

(Continued on page 44)



"I've been thinking Briggs. Since you spend most of your time in here anyway . . ."

Dog doping is a cruel and nasty business. The animals are often drugged so much and so often by crooked owners that they develop into dope addicts, forever craving for another "shot". Then they become so savage they have to be destroyed and their bodies secretly buried. It seems a pity that these beautiful animals are so often the innocent prey of cruel and rapacious human criminals.



Drugs are used which slow down a dog's heart beat and give it a fantastic turn of speed for a short time. When the race is over, it is often so exhausted that its handler has to half carry it back to its kennel. Conversely, chloretone, used in sea-sickness remedies, has long been a favorite with modern greyhound dopers. It makes the animal feel as if a ton has been dropped on its head.

WILES

PROBABLY no sport in the world is so plagued by vicious racketeers as is greyhound racing in England. Periodically, gangs of dopers are rounded up, convicted and sentenced to terms of up to five years imprisonment — but there are always plenty more "lurk" boys waiting to cash in on the crooked profits that can be made at the hundreds of booming dog tracks that dot the country.

Every night of the week except Sunday, greyhounds are racing at different tracks through the United Kingdom. Sixty-five of the biggest dog tracks are members of the National Greyhound Racing Society, which employs 300 ex-police officers as members of its Security Service to protect punters from crooks. Unfortunately, there are at least another 120 independent tracks where there is no such supervision.

Even at the supervised tracks the greyhound racketeers do occasionally get away with their tricks. Thus a few years ago, a crooked coup was successfully perpetrated at London's White City, recognised as the most heavily guarded track in the world.

Hours before every meeting, the dogs are housed at White City under the care of men of the Security Service. The dogs for each race are kept in separate high walled yards, each dog in its own steel-lined compartment or kennel.

Just before the race, they are taken from the yard to the starting boxes in a big van like a Black Maria. There is no apparent way anyone can get at the dogs after they reach White City.

One December night, the last race at White City had only five runners — Kilmacoe Lad, Fly Bessie, Victory Speech, Bald Truth and Jimmy Chicken. All the dogs were safely placed in the starting boxes, and then there was a wild betting plunge on Bald Truth, which dropped in price from 8/1 to 3/1 in a couple of moments.

The race started. The boxes flew open, and the five dogs plunged out in a bunch. Seconds later, four of them seemed to falter. One stumbled, and the other three slowed to a confused, heavy-legged gait little better than a trot.

Only one dog, Bald Truth, was running normally, and he strode easily to the lead. At the winning post he was 15 lengths in front of his four bewildered and obviously doped rivals.

Within seconds, tough-looking "smarties" in flashy suits and pointed shoes rushed up to dozens of bookmakers, brandishing winning tickets and demanding payment.

OF THE DOG DOPERS

Although they knew the other runners had been "got at", there was nothing the bookies could do, and they paid up. At the tote windows stood other members of the gang, with fistfuls of Bald Truth tickets. Total estimated winnings were £100,000.

White City officials called in Scotland Yard, and Superintendent Fabian (now retired) investigated. A careful search of the steel-lined kennels where the five dogs had been housed revealed, in several of them, traces of fish impregnated with the drug chloretone.

Used in sea-sickness remedies, chloretone has long been a favorite with modern greyhound dopers. Its particular value is that the dog which has swallowed it shows no sign until in the excitement and exertion of the race its blood pressure goes up. Then the drug reacts, and the animal feels as if a ton weight has been dropped on its head.

There were nine kennels in the yard. Only five had been used. Fabian meticulously examined the others. In three he found nothing. The last kennel, however, had some timber piled inside it.

"That one's not in use," an attendant told the Superintendent. "I found it nailed up this afternoon when I came on duty. Apparently it's been used to store that timber."

"Who nailed it up?" demanded Fabian.

Neither the attendant nor anyone else seemed to know. Fabian then tried the door, and to everyone's surprise it swung open on well oiled hinges.

Entering the kennel, Fabian found why the attendant thought the door had been nailed up. Someone had fitted metal bolts inside the door and locked himself in.

It was easy then to work out what had happened. Someone had entered White City via the outside wall sometime the previous night. He knew which yard would be used for dogs in the last race and had secreted himself in one of the kennels — locking himself in and arranging pieces of timber he had brought with him to hide himself and make it appear the kennel was stacked full of it.

He had remained concealed in the kennel until the dogs had arrived and been placed in their compartments. Then, when the attendant was absent for a few minutes, he had sneaked out and fed the drugged fish to all the dogs except Bald Truth. Back in the kennel, he had waited until the dogs were re-

moved in the van and on their way to the start. Then it was an easy matter to slip out of the yard, meet his confederates and give them the signal that all was well and they could make the plunge on Bald Truth.

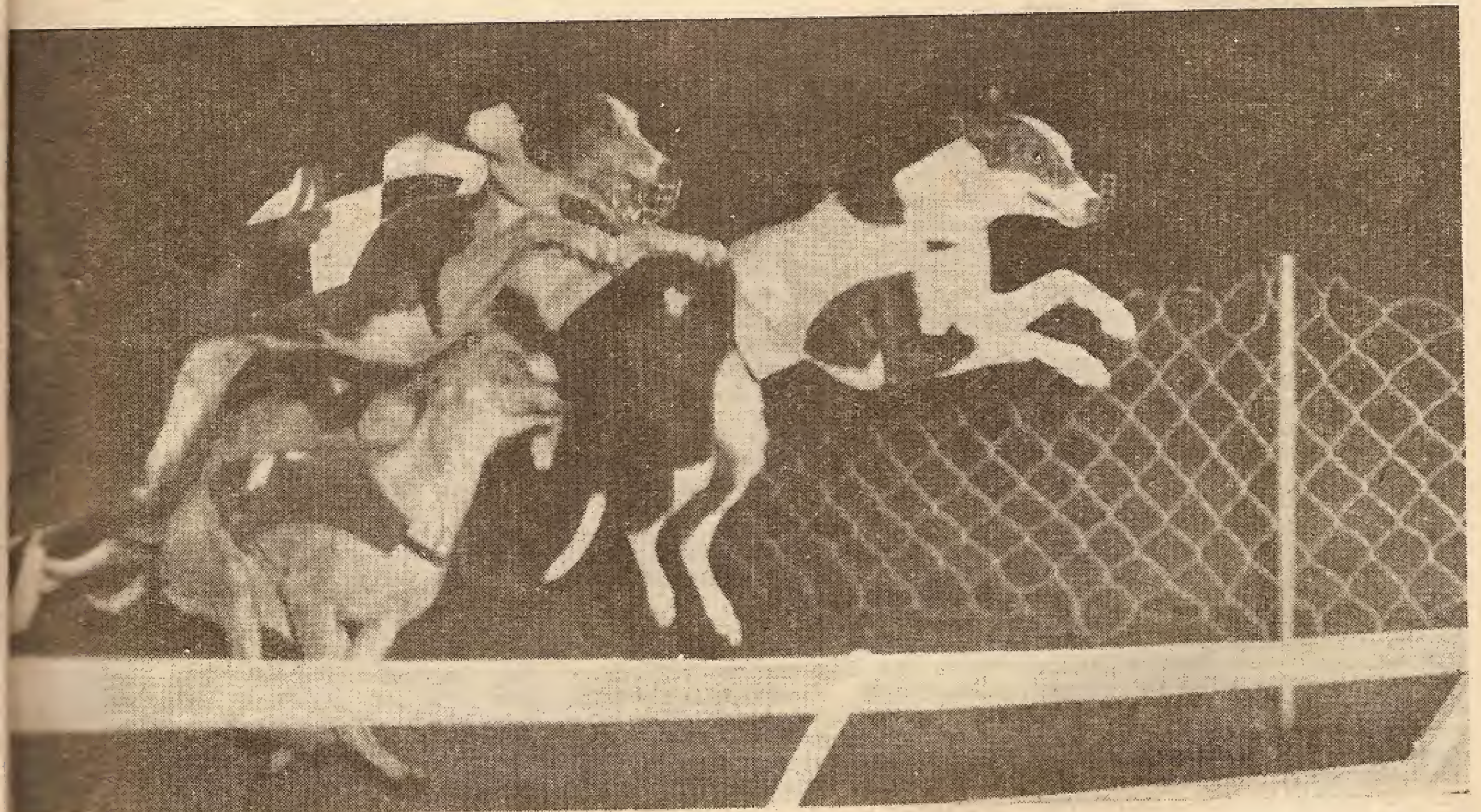
Fabian knew how the ramp had been worked — but it was a different story nailing the man responsible. He set detectives checking on all the well-known dog-dopers, and it did not take long to discover that a fellow well known to the police had suddenly acquired plenty of money and was busily spending it like an Arabian oil sheikh on a spree.

Every way Fabian knew was tried to get someone to talk, but to no avail. His men trailed the suspect 24 hours a day but could find nothing to pin on him. In desperation the Superintendent resorted to bluff.

He walked up to the crook as he sat in a hotel bar and said, "Hard luck. We know all about it."

A startled fellow looked up and blinked nervously. "Yes," went on Fabian. "It's a dead tumble that White City job." He looked his man in the eye and waited hopefully for him to make a slip.

Greyhounds can be traced back to Biblical times, when they were used as hunters. It seems a pity that these beautiful animals, which many claim are the oldest pure-bred dogs in the world, are so often the innocent prey of human criminals.



Wiles Of The Dog Dopers cont.

It was no good. He had recovered his poise and a smile spread over his face. "Have a drink, Mr. Fabian," he invited. "You know you've got nothing on me."

The Superintendent sighed and had the drink. He kept trying, but as time went on he found the suspect was right — he had nothing on him. Officially the Bald Truth doping case remains unsolved to this day.

Not all the dog dopers get away with it. In 1955 three men were found guilty at the Old Bailey and each sent to jail for 15 months for conspiring to cheat people betting on dogs. One of the three men was a brilliant Harley Street specialist and another was a wealthy jeweller who owned several unregistered dog tracks.

Unfortunately for them, two Scotland Yard detectives happened to overhear them talking in the bar of London's Cock Tavern and put two and two together when they heard words like greyhound, White City, male hormones, cortisone, injection, blood pressure and sugar in the blood.

A watch was put on the three men. The doctor, who was obviously supplying the drugs, sent a registered parcel to one of the other men. The next day, after the postman had delivered the parcel at the flat of the addressee, detectives staged a raid. Spread out on a table was the opened parcel — containing a hypodermic syringe and quantities of various drugs including hexamethonium bromide.

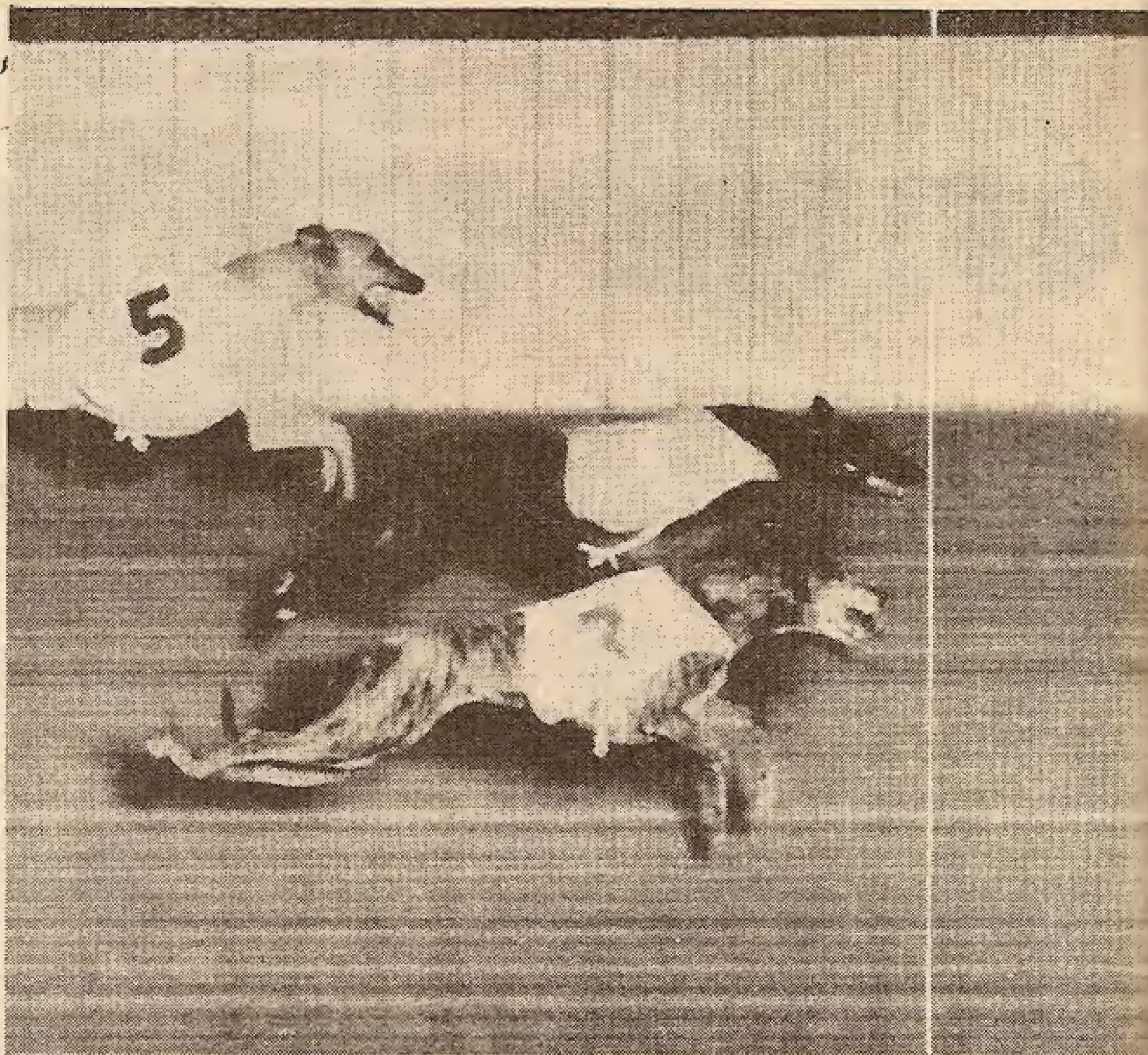
In court the whole plot was revealed. Half a dozen unknown but promising greyhounds had been bought in Ireland by the third conspirator. In England they were to be entered in a number of unimportant races and run while doped with the traceless hexamethonium bromide.

This had the effect of lowering their blood pressure, and the sugar content of the blood would go down — resulting in poor runs and bad times. The dogs would continue to be low graded by handicappers and entered in races with dogs of similar poor performances.

Naturally there would finally come a day for each dog when the three men would gamble heavily on it — and on that day it would run undoped, on its merits. All was set for a big clean-up when the police swooped following the ill-advised conversation in the Cock Tavern that was audible to the two detectives.

The jury took only 45 minutes to find the trio guilty, and for the doctor the punishment of 15 months imprisonment was only a minor matter compared with the subsequent action by the BMA to remove his name from the medical register.

Another greyhound racketeer who came to grief a few years ago forced



Camera finishes knocked out some officials, particularly in the country, who were not renowned for straight dealing. A few years back a race judge blandly signalled a dead-heat when his dog was beaten into second place . . .

his way into a trainer's yard late at night and stole a well-performed dog from its kennel. He kept it out of the way for about three months until the furore had died down and then dyed it black, leaving a diamond-shaped patch around one of its eyes. The dog was taken to an unregistered track in the Midlands and entered in a race for novice dogs as "The White-Eyed Kaffir", after a famous comedian of the music-hall days.

To make sure there was no slip-up, the dog was fed a pep drug although it would have been good enough to beat its opponents on three legs. "The White-Eyed Kaffir" opened in the betting at 10/1 and firmed to 7/4 as the crook and his associates shovelled bets on it.

But in his eagerness for a big clean-up the mastermind of the scheme had made a bad blunder by drugging the dog. It walked in by such a big margin that suspicion was immediately aroused following the tremendous betting plunge. Bookmakers on the course held a hurried conference and announced they would pay no winning bets until there was an inquiry into the bona fides of "The White-Eyed Kaffir".

Meanwhile the kennel boy had taken the dog for the customary sponge down — and in the process his hands turned black. The gang fled, leaving their heavy stake money in the bookmakers' bags. Within a few hours, the "brains" of the fiasco and one of his aides had been

arrested, and they were subsequently jailed for 18 months apiece.

The number of times the plots of the greyhound dopers blow up in their faces and end in disaster, it seems a wonder so many of them keep in the business. The answer must be that we only hear of the rackets that are detected. Many more of the crooks must quietly get away with it, and no one is any the wiser.

A scheme that did not succeed took place at a dog track in the North of England in 1952. It was the brainchild of a gang of dopers who through sheer bad luck were all speedily arrested and jailed. They dosed three greyhounds in a certain race with dope to make them run slow. There was a rank outsider in the field which no one thought had a show so they left it alone. That left two other dogs, and on these they wagered heavily on the tote, convinced they could not lose.

When the starting boxes opened, to everyone's astonishment all six dogs in the field staggered out like a bunch of drunks. Looking around, the perplexed conspirators recognised another gang in the crowd. They had doped the other two dogs and the outsider. As a result, no dog finished the course. The race was declared off, and detectives were quick off the mark to round up both gangs.

Dog doping is a cruel and nasty business. The animals are often drugged so much and so often by

crooked owners that they develop into dope addicts, forever craving for another "shot". Then they become so savage they have to be destroyed and their bodies secretly buried.

Drugs are used which slow down a dog's heart beat and give it a fantastic turn of speed for a short time. But when the race is over, it is often so exhausted that its handler has to half carry it back to its kennel.

The drugs eventually begin to get a grip on the animal. It loses its appetite and then its form and can run no faster no matter how much dope it is fed.

It's a vicious circle. The more dope the crooks give the dog the more it wants. Its muscles start to twitch; its eyes get bloodshot — both warning signs that it is rapidly approaching a stage of savagery when it can kill a man. If the dog is deprived of the drug when in that state it reverts to type, becomes a wolf ready to attack any living thing that comes near it.

In 1958 a greyhound trainer in Manchester, England, was attacked by a dog he had been doping. He was knocked sprawling on his back and his face ripped open. Only a kennel boy managed to kick the maddened dog off, the doper would have been killed. As it was, his face required 32 stitches, and his own mother would now hardly recognise him.

It is at the independent greyhound tracks in the United Kingdom where the dope rackets really flourish. Supervision is lax, and often it is possible for a crook to arrive with his dog a bare five minutes before the race start. Naturally that gives them the chance to inject quick-acting liquid drugs direct into the bloodstream, with a dramatic effect on the animal's heart and performance.

Last year a veteran doper "confessed" to a London paper how he had used this last minute doping method at a Scottish track. He had already given his dog a phial of cortisone to pep it up, but then learned another very good performer was also entered for the race. Clearly something extra was nec-

essary if the doper's dog was to win, and accordingly he gave him an injection just before he was taken to the start. "He was so pepped up when he got to the boxes," he told the newspaper, "that he was tearing clods out of the turf with his paws in his eagerness. Luckily for me nobody noticed it."

"At the start he broke from the trap the split second it was opened, and he won by half a length. Of course he wasn't worth a damn by the time I got him back to my hotel. He could hardly walk from exhaustion, and the vets say such an injection permanently damages the heart."

"It's a hard game all right — but you've got to be hard if you're going to stay afloat in it. There are so many doped dogs at the unregistered tracks that if yours isn't doped too, you'd probably never win a race unless you had a champion."

One of England's worst greyhound racketeers was a character known as "The Ringer". His nickname came from his specialty of "ringing in" a good dog as some no-hoper and so making him a certainty to win a selected race. He made an estimated £10,000 a year for 20 years out of greyhounds and then switched to horses for a final £200,000 clean-up.

He successfully substituted a good performer for a mediocre French horse in the Spa Selling Plate at Bath Races one day in July, 1953. The phony duly won at 10/1, and it was then found that it had been backed with scores of off-the-course bookies from southern England to the north of Scotland.

All would have been well for The Ringer and his associates had not an elderly ditch-digger gone to the police with a story that he had seen two men in a truck cut several telephone cables into the Bath race-track that day. This had been done so the bookies could not telephone

the bets back to the course and so reduce the horse's starting price.

However the ditch-digger's story started a Scotland Yard investigation as a result of which the whole gang was rounded up. Four men were sent to jail with sentences ranging from nine months to three years for The Ringer himself.

England's biggest doping ring in the history of greyhounds was smashed in December, 1958. Ten conspirators — including seven girls who had been working as kennel-maids — were sent to prison for terms up to three years. The leader had been engaged in the racket for 14 years without a mishap, and he probably could have continued indefinitely but for one girl who refused to go through with a doping because she loved dogs.

The girl was working as a kennel-maid at Sunbury, Middlesex, when one morning she went nervously to her kennel manager. She stammered out a story that she had been paid £70 by two men she met in a London hotel to give dope to three of the greyhounds under her care by means of pellets in meat-balls.

Police were called in and the widespread racket disclosed. Other kennelmaids all over England were investigated and a number of them were found to be working in league with the gangsters.

At the trial after the crooks were rounded up, it was estimated that the leader of the gang had made about £110,000 from doping in the previous five years. He had escaped detection for so long because he bought his drugs abroad. Apart from phenobarbitone and luminol, he had also discovered a liquid made in France which paralyses an animal's muscles. He would simply smear it on his hand, then pat the back of the dog he wished to slow up.

The gang leader in this case

England is the home of the vicious racketeers who plague greyhound racing. Australian crooks were not so cruel as their English cousins. One of the most popular old-time Aussie tricks to prevent a dog winning was to stick a wad of chewing gum between the pads of its foot. Ring-ins were successfully perpetrated in NSW as recently as 1949 — officials claim that doping is now impossible at Australian dog tracks.





"You should appreciate this, doctor. It seems I left my wrench in your engine."

made a statement to the English Press that in 1955 he went to Australia and cleaned up £24,000 in one race at Sydney's Harold Park greyhound track. He claimed that he successfully doped all the dogs except two in a selected race with phenobarbitone, practically putting them to sleep. Then he backed the other two (which were then certainties to run first and second) on the quinella and in due course collected his cash.

Sydney officials denied the possibility of such a coup and said the Englishman had invented the tale to sell his story to an English paper. They were probably right, for such a doping scheme is generally admitted to have been

impossible at an Australian dog track as late as 1955. For all that, there was a time some years ago when the Australian greyhound sport was notorious as a crooks' paradise.

In those bad old days, skulduggery at local tracks was so blatant that only the most starry-eyed of the gambling public would risk a bet on the "dogs". Hot favorites lost with monotonous regularity — often because they were fed before their races with finely ground menthol crystals hidden in a blob of whipped cream or some such delicacy.

The effect was to snap their wind. They jumped out of their boxes like champions, but after 50

yards could be depended on by their crooked connections to slow to a mere trot. Stewards, until they tumbled to the trick, decided the dogs had pulled a muscle or broken down and took no action. No after effects were suffered and a week or so later, at a much more attractive price for those in the know, the dog would show all its old form and bolt in.

Other tricks Australian gambling crooks thought up to prevent a dog winning until it was wanted were to stick a wad of chewing gum between the pads of its foot, or slip a rubber band around a couple of them. Such hindrances probably stayed there only a short distance, but that was probably enough to ruin any chance the discomfited animals had. For a while the greyhound "shrewdies" wanting to stop a dog concealed extra weights in the muzzle — until one dog made such a fuss at the start officials investigated and discovered the racket.

A certain Sydney greyhound bookmaker made a specialty of laying at very attractive prices dogs he knew were "crook" and had no chance. Only once did his plans come unstuck. He approached the owner of a near-champion dog regarded as having a mortgage on the last race at Harold Park one Saturday night. For a consideration the owner saw the wisdom of losing.

All the Saturday afternoon the owner was busy with his greyhound. He took it swimming for hours behind a launch, ran it for miles behind his car and then filled it up with as much food and drink as it could consume. The result was that at six o'clock, when taken to the track, the animal's only interest was in sleeping. The conspirators forgot, however, that the race was more than four hours later. In that time the dog recovered all its old vigor. It bounced out at the start and was never headed, breaking the course record for the distance.

Not all Australian greyhound officials either, particularly in the country, were renowned for straight dealing. At a certain meeting a few years back, several spectators at the finishing line were amused by the stentorian shouts of encouragement given to one of the runners by a leathery-lunged individual nearby. He turned out to be a race judge. His choice, however, was not good enough and failed by at least a neck to overtake the leader. The quick-thinking judge blandly signalled a dead-heat.

As recently as 1949, ring-ins were successfully perpetrated in New South Wales. That year three men went to jail for their part in substituting a top-class performer for a Queensland maiden at a country meeting. Police estimated £3000 was obtained with that single trick.

Minute preparations were necessary. A pup was registered, its papers so altered that they fitted another dog's description.

This dog was entered for a minor race and sensationally backed down to 3/1 on. He came home like a rocket, winning by 10 lengths.

However officials smelt a rat.

They examined the dog, but, as he conformed to his papers and gave no signs of being doped, they gave the all-clear that bets were to be paid. Nevertheless they were still not satisfied and ordered the dog impounded for further investigation.

CIB detectives were called in, and they soon uncovered the plot. The ringleaders were arrested and charges made which earned them prison sentences of two years a piece.

Several greyhound ring-in gangs have operated in the NSW North Coast district. Some years ago, one of them engaged a skilled woman beauty specialist to help disguise a champion dog to look like something else. All went well until the dye she put on the dog's feet began to wear off and was spotted by an alert official.

On another occasion, a well-known Sydney champion was kidnapped. He was taken by air to a country track and rung-in for another dog. To make absolutely certain of winning, the crooks liberally dosed the dog with a dangerous drug. He won and they cleaned up a fortune. Police later traced the dog to Coolangatta and recovered him. The drug, however, had taken heavy toll, and it was a physical wreck when returned to its heart-broken owner.

These days, fortunately, are over in Australia. However, gangs are still flourishing in Great Britain. Periodically gangs of dopers are rounded up, convicted and sentenced to terms of up to five years imprisonment — yet there are still plenty of shady



"Well don't think of them as bars, think of them as room dividers."

characters waiting to cash in on the crooked profits that can be made at the hundreds of dog tracks that dot the country.

Greyhounds can be traced back to Biblical times, when they were

used as hunters. It seems a pity that these beautiful animals, which many claim are the oldest pure-bred dogs in the world, are so often the innocent prey of cruel and rapacious human criminals.



"SCAT!"





APPOINTMENT IN TANGIER

Drugs weren't my business — but I needed the money! And when this beautiful Brigitte Bardot-Anita Ekberg doll made the signs and a promise, I was lead like a bull to the slaughter . . .

IT'S tough arriving in Italy with only the price of a bottle of vino between you and starvation. But it would've been tougher to be on the other side of the border, after the last messed-up job; all the rest were probably sitting in some Surete office sweating it out with the gendarmes. And they could be tough. If that tourist couple hadn't fallen for my story and hid me, I wouldn't even have made it — or have the price of some vino.

I found a place and ordered my bottle. The waiter, by some sixth sense, knew it was all I had, and showed no interest in me, just shoved the drink down and went away. I took my time drinking it, seeing I had nowhere to go, and by the time I was half way through it the management was becoming restless. Perhaps I was a bad advertisement for the place in my dirty clothes. The management approached to throw me out, but suddenly looked over my shoulder and gave up.

Saved by another customer, I thought.

The newcomer sat down beside me and looked at me closely. He was small and dapper, and had an upsetting way of looking.

"Hi," I said, after a few minutes. "Parli English?"

"Yes, Signore, and I speak it grammatically. Shall we use that language?" I let that ride, and he continued. "Mr. Regan, isn't? Dick Regan?"

I nodded. I had nothing to lose.

"I thought you were in France, Mr. Regan. Your photograph was in the French papers yesterday." He looked at his polished finger nails. "I make it my business to read a selection of foreign papers. The information is useful sometimes."

I said nothing. The finger he'd been studying raised itself an inch and a waiter appeared at his elbow. He rattled out some rapid Italian and, turning to me again said, "Drink your wine, I have ordered more. We have a lot to talk about. May I ask you your future plans?"

"I'd like to get out of the country," I said.

"Somewhere south or east, I expect," he said. "It is difficult without money or passport however, and there are some other complications in your case. Tell me, can you use an aqualung?"

"I've used them before."

"Then I may be able to help you. Shall we depart and discuss business in more congenial surroundings? My car is outside."

"Let's wait for the fresh bottle."

"Pah, I have better wine than that, and more than you could drink in six years," he said. "Leave it and come." He threw down a banknote, and I followed him out.

If you're a middleclass Italian, you can afford to run a Vespa or a Fiat; a rich one can afford an Alfa Romeo or a Lancia; he ran a Facel Vega, imported from France and worth a fortune. They're supposed to tow smoothly from 15 to 150 miles an hour in top. This one, once we reached the autostrada, touched 100 in 40 seconds without straining and purred happily along at three figures. And when we reached his "more congenial surroundings", they matched the car.

The palace he lived in stood on a cliff overlooking the sea, and he owned enough land to make it invisible from the road. As we pulled up, the main doors opened, and a servant with a face like a rock-carving came out. Immediately we got out of the car he took it away. I looked after him questioningly.

"My valet, Amedeo," he said. "A Sicilian, and a deaf-mute. The Carabinieri caught him, and I was tardy in rescuing him. By the time my assistants found him, he could no longer talk or hear, or for that matter, progenerate. He is very bitter, of course, but completely faithful to me."

"I can understand that. That reminds me, I don't know your name."

"You can call me Botticelli. It means, of course, little tub, but it was good enough for the old master, and will do for me. Now, would you be kind enough to sit down?" We had arrived in a medium sized room lined with books and oil paint-

ings. From the uninteresting look of them, they were old and valuable. I took the chair he pointed at, and Amedeo appeared with a bottle, a siphon, some ice, and a bulge under his left armpit that hadn't been there before. A well-fitted holster, I thought, as he put the things down and stood behind my chair.

"I imagine whisky will be more to your taste, Mr. Regan," Botticelli said. "Now, shall we commence? Amedeo can lip read Italian, so you may speak English. We are alone apart from him."

"You're making the proposition," I said.

"Ah, yes, very observant of you. Well, Mr. Regan, I have heard you will do anything for money. Further, I would point out that in your present condition, you have little choice about what you do. If you accept my — ah — proposition, you will get a certain amount of cash, and be landed at any country convenient to yourself, if you do not accept, you will not leave here alive."

"You make it difficult to refuse."

"Of course. You will understand that I make my living from smuggling. There are a large number of smugglers in this country. I am one of the most successful. I have a rival who is threatening to usurp my position. He is, in fact, using my territories for his business. He drops his prizes about 20 miles out that way." He pointed out the window at the sea.

"Just drops it in the sea? How does he pick it up?"

"Radar is the biggest difficulty in picking it up. He has solved this by standing his boat off about two miles, and having a diver on a one-man submarine pick it up. In this way, and with a discreet time lag between dropping and picking it up, he averts all suspicion."

"So you want me to swipe it in the time lag? How deep? How much time lag?"

"About 130 ft. He usually waits about two hours before sending a boat to pick it up. It requires another 30 minutes for the submarine to reach the spot. His boat poses as an underwater research vessel."

"How do we find the loot? At 130 ft it can fall in a lot of places."

"Fortunately, our Italian waters are clear, and the canister will be painted a bright yellow. Moreover, it contains a device which emits regular noises, which are discernable underwater for some distance. You will be taken out in my boat as soon as it is dropped, and will be wearing an oversize dry diving suit. When you have located the



canister, you will strap it to yourself. This will be necessary, it will be too large to hold. Inflate your suit with air, and rise gently to the surface to be picked up."

"If it's so big, howcome nobody sees it go overboard? And what happens if the customs boys get us?"

"You are very inquisitive. The canister is placed on the hull of the ship like a limpet mine, and automatically released when an agent sends a signal of the correct tone through the ship's hull by means of a portable signal generator. In answer to your second question, my boat can show its stern to any customs cutter. As you will have noticed, I appreciate fast things. In case you meet a rival diver, we have imported an American device—an underwater CO2 pistol, capable of killing at 25 feet. Satisfied?"

"One more question. Seeing you know all this, why don't you just get rid of him by informing?"

"I shall, when I can no longer profit from him. Now if you are agreeable, we have a week before us. You should spend it practising. I suggest you limit your intake of

alcohol in the meantime. You will live here of course. Everything you want will be provided, and a payment at the end of, say, £500."

"A thousand. And how about some signorinas?"

"You are in no position to bargain, Mr. Regan. And you will have all the signorinas you can afford after you finished. It is too dangerous before that."

"All right, 500. And —"

"Va!" Botticelli shouted looking over my shoulder, and added some more Italian too rapid for me to understand. I looked at the doorway and caught a glimpse of something that made Brigitte Bardot look sexless and Anita Ekberg uninteresting all at the same time, before Botticelli screamed "Va!" again, and she went.

"Ah," I said, "I thought you said no signorinas. I'll take the job."

"You would have taken it anyway," he said smoothly. "You will not see her again. And now, another drink?"

So we had another drink.

A week later I was fitter than I ever had been since I stopped play-

ing football at college. I'd been diving every day and since spearguns with lungs are barred in Italy and we didn't want to take chances, I'd been practising with a snorkel and catching enough fish to feed us.

Amedeo and I climbed into Botticelli's speedboat, checked our gear, and cast off. The three-bottle lung was full to capacity, the CO2 pistol was fully charged, some ballast and a silenced 7mm rifle were there for company. The twin motors made the boat plane faster than I'd ever been on water. In half an hour we had reached the dumping spot, and I was over the side.

The water closed over my head, and I sank slowly, feet first, into the depths. I flipped over, 10 feet from the bottom, and started swimming outwards in a spiral. In five minutes I had the signal loud and clear, and in another five I had the canister strapped on and was preparing to inflate my suit. Suddenly I felt a shattering impact on my left shoulder and a searing pain. I looked at it, and saw the barb of a spear opening as it was pulled back through it.

Clumsily I pushed backwards and around, and pulled out my pistol. Ten feet above me, another diver had the spear cord and was reeling me in like a fish. I took careful aim and shot him through the solar plexus. He spat his mouthpiece out and bubbled bloodily as he sank.

I unscrewed the spear head and pulled it out. It was lucky he hadn't hit me a few inches to the right I thought. I grabbed him and inflated my suit, and we floated away from his torpedo. We could fill his suit with ballast, he'd never come up and nobody would ever know the difference.

As I broke water with my ex-rival in front of me I saw Amedeo squinting down the sights of the 7mm. Instantaneously I heard the soft plop of the rifle, and felt and heard the thud as the bullet took my burden in the head. I half submerged and sheltered behind him. So they were going to kill me and take the loot, were they.

Amedeo started the engine and lined the boat up on us, satisfaction written all over his greasy face. Suddenly the topsides of the boat splintered two feet from the driver's seat. The sound of the shot followed a few seconds later. The rivals were on to us, my confused mind screamed, but a fair way off, thank God. Still, things were getting much too hot. As Amedeo turned sharply I sank a few feet, blew a little air into my companion's suit, turned him upside down, and sent him slowly bubbling toward the bottom. His air stream should confuse the chase a bit, I thought, and I sucked out my suit and headed for the bottom.

His torpedo was still there, with two spare lungs on board. The electric motor started silently, and conserving my breath as well as possible, I scuttled along the bottom.

An hour later the torpedo's batteries were flat, and I was out of air and faint from loss of blood. My suit was full of water, so I



"You told me you'd be working tonight. You know, David, this is the second time I've caught you lying this week!"

swam laboriously upwards, resting every few feet as the air supply came on again. At last I broke the surface and looked round. There was nobody in sight. I had dropped my weight belt when I started to come up, and now I flopped over onto the empty bottles and relaxed. The sun was warm and I was shot. I think I passed out.

The next thing I knew a boat hook dug into my damaged shoulder and the pain shocked me awake. I was dragged over to the side of a boat, my lung was cut off me, and I got aboard with some help, after the canister had been strapped to the side. I looked at my rescuer.

"Well," I said, "the Brigitte Bardot-Anita Ekberg doll. Nice to see you."

"The name," she said, "is Rossana, and it is also nice to see you, Mr. Regan."

"Call me Dick," I said, all gallant, "Where is our mutual friend Botticelli?"

"He is not my friend, nor yours, I suspect. He left in a hurry when Amedeo returned without you. I decided to see if I could find you, so I borrowed the outboard motor boat. Allowing a decent interval for the other craft to depart," she added as an afterthought.

"What caused them to depart?"

Damn, I thought, I'm beginning to talk like them now.

"Botticelli informed the customs before he left," she said simply.

"They had words together."

"And were you looking for me or the canister?"

"Well, I find you very attractive, and a fortune in drugs is not to be disregarded."

"If one has the market," I said.

"You can arrange that when you are well," she said. "In the meantime, the coast above here is very rocky, and at a sufficient distance from the palazzo. I know of a cave where you can be safe and warm while you heal."

"With you, Rossana, I'm sure I'll heal much more rapidly," I said, and passed out again.

* * *

I slept most of the first three days in my cave, while Rossana took the boat closer to civilisation each day and walked in to get provisions. With the good food and care, and a goodmorning or goodnight kiss every time I woke up or went to sleep, I healed rapidly, and soon began to take notice. Rossana was sleeping in the cave, and she wasn't modest about it. She was built in a way to make octogenarians ogle, as well. On the third night I felt fairly right, and when she came to kiss me goodnight I grabbed her and pulled her down. She lay on me and laughed as I kissed her. Then, as my hands slid down her back, she pushed me gently away. I wasn't as strong as I thought.

"You see," she said. "You are still weak. Wait until later."

I waited then until the fifth night and captured her again. This time she couldn't get away.

"Well," I said, "Am I strong enough now?" As I slid my hand round from her back she relaxed for a moment and then wriggled away



"My name's Phillip Packer. Will you marry me?"

as I loosened my other arm.

"Yes," she said, panting slightly. "You are certainly strong enough now, and so you will have business tomorrow, and must save your strength for it. When you sell that canister, I will be yours."

"Who can I sell it to? I don't know anybody."

"Why not Botticelli and have your revenge too?" she asked innocently. "I have managed to obtain a small pistol."

"Yeah, why not?" I thought about it for a while, and began to like the idea. "But we've got all tonight. How about a little advance?"

"You will need all your strength tomorrow, carissima," she said. "Wait a little." And she made a very intimate gesture and went to her rug.

The next morning we dumped the canister in about 10 feet of water under a ledge, and I took the boat along the coast toward the palazzo. He wasn't likely to be there, as it was only rented for the job, but it was a good place to start.

I coasted into the landing as close to the rocks as I could get

with the motor shut off. The steps were out of sight of the palace, so I went up them good and fast. Then a quick crouching run round the house had me by the main doors. And also the Facel Vega. I was in luck. It had its doors open and was obviously being packed, so I took the keys out and stepped into the shadow behind a column by the palazzo doors.

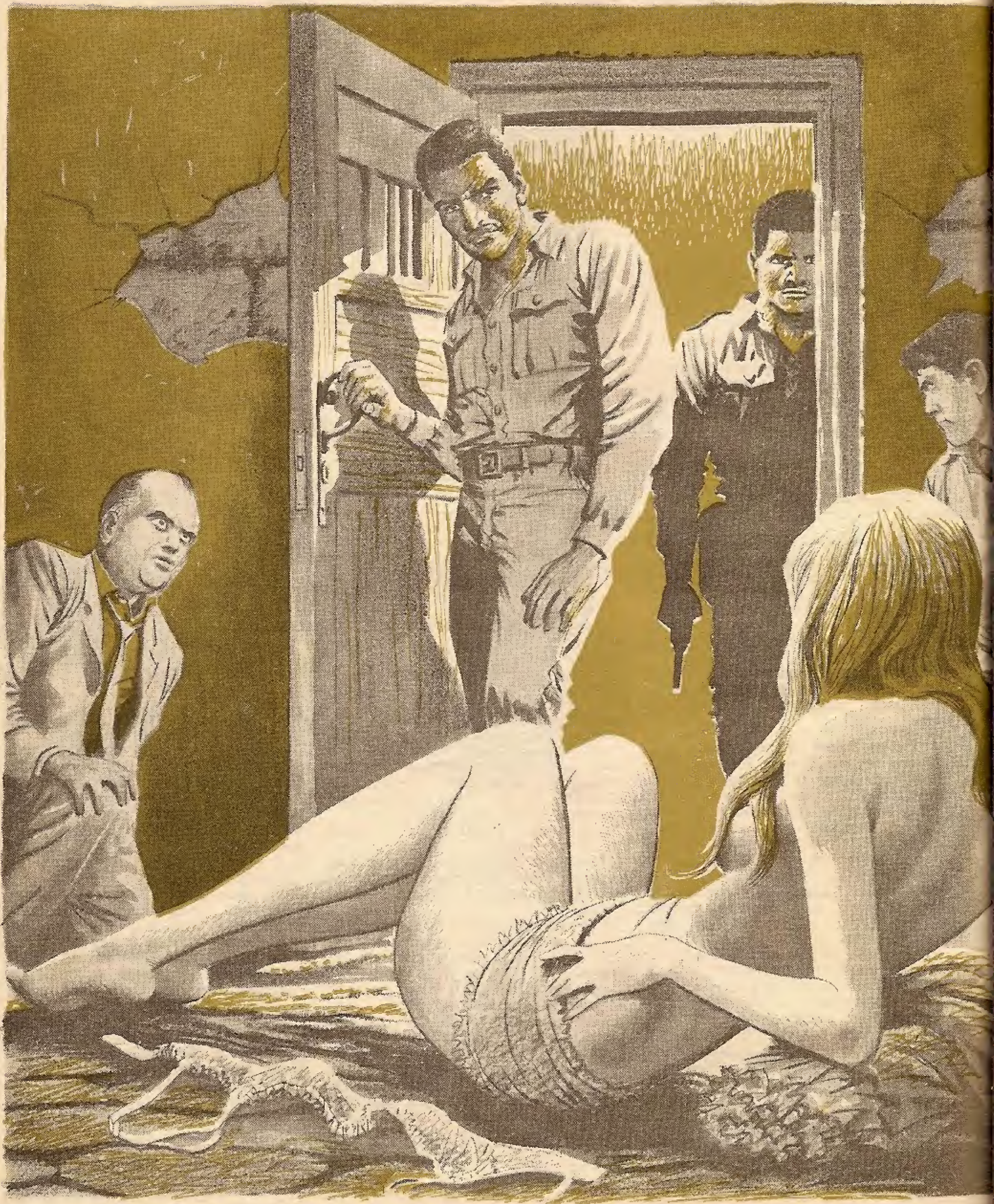
It wasn't long before Amedeo came out, laden down with suitcases. He walked right into my roundarm swing. The toy pistol hit him right between the eyes.

I kicked him aside and slipped into the hall, and then the library. Botticelli was there, picking books off the shelves. I pussyfooted up behind him, reached round and grabbed a handful of his slack belly, spun him round and tossed him into a chair, giving the fat an extra twist as I did it. He sat there looking green and holding his stomach.

"Long time since I saw you, Botticelli," I said. "How's things?"

(Continued on page 55)

ONE HOT



NIGHT IN ORAN

This interview was taken by Marius Servant, French newspaperman of Marseilles, on behalf of this writer. The notes were signed by M. La Brecque and submitted to the French military authorities in Oran for official clearance and, if desired, any amendments they might wish to make for security reasons. No amendments were made. The facts were cleared for publication but publication in Algeria was forbidden. The authorities were

asked for a comment and stated that there was nothing to report and "nothing very unusual about the case except that Mlle. Filuk and M. La Brecque escaped with their lives". Incidents of white people being kidnapped and murdered while held as hostages, the authorities said, "are all too common in Algeria" but are largely suppressed in the cause of security.

I COULD not decide whether I was blind or whether the place in which I regained consciousness was so dark that I could see nothing. A pneumatic drill hammered at my head until I thought my brain would explode. I tried to lift my hand to my forehead and a sharp-edged rawhide thong bit into my flesh.

I heard someone groaning in the dark and called out, "Hallo, hallo. Who are you? Where are we?" My voice was hoarse, my throat dry and painful. No one replied, but the groans continued.

I tried to move my legs and found that they were just as firmly lashed together at the ankles as my wrists were lashed together behind my back. I was trussed up like a chicken for the spit, lying half on my side, my body protesting at every movement I made in sheer blind agony.

My brain began to clear slowly in a painful process as I tried to recall the events of the night, but there was little to recall except that I knew I had been taken for a ride by the girl I had met in the Cafe d'Oran on the Rue de la Republique in Oran. I said aloud in the intense darkness, "I am going to get even with that bitch!" but just or when I could not figure.

All I remember very clearly was meeting this girl in the cafe — one of those joints where you drink, dine and dance and buy tickets and select your girl to dance or sit out with you. She told me her name was Vivienne and that she had originally come from Marseilles to work in Oran as a restaurant hostess. Now that I looked back on the matter I did not believe anything of what she said. I figured that I should have known she was a rebel spy.

She wasn't much more than 22 or 23, a brunette with almost coal-black eyes and full sensuous lips. I bought up the rest of her time and we sat drinking French wine at £1 a bottle until after midnight when I asked her if I could go along to her apartment.

"It will cost you £10," she said.

She asked to be excused and went off in the direction of the women's powder-room and returned after about 15 minutes, smiling. She had a light imitation mink wrap around her sun-tanned shoulders and low-cut V-fronted evening gown revealing full sun-tanned busts that made my blood quicken in my veins. I was on vacation for 10 days in Oran from my job in Tangier. Taking coals to Newcastle or if you like a busman's holiday, but I did not want to go back to France for my vacation owing to a long outstanding little matter I had to settle with the police in Marseilles, a little matter involving a fight I had with a gendarme which I won.

"I live quite nearby," Vivienne said as we stepped onto the sidewalk on this hot April night. Some Algerians and Arab riffraff were touting picture postcards of nude women and tickets for a Maltese sweepstake on the sidewalk. I brushed them aside with a curse and pushed on with the girl on my arm.

We came to an alleyway, dark and dismal like most streets and alleys in Oran. A couple of legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion stood talking on the corner, one whistled at the girl but I was wise enough to ignore it. Two gendarmes armed with pisols and a soldier carrying a light, quick-firing rifle came by as we walked down the alley. I never felt safer in my life even though Oran seethed with unrest and the previous night two bomb outrages in the city had killed five Arabs and two Frenchmen and a French child.

Near the bottom of the alley, just before it joined up with the Rue Bretagne, the girl stopped and inserted a latch key in a door, pushed the door open and invited me in. She walked ahead along a dark passage and mounted a stairway much like the stairway of some tenement in any city's poorer quarters.

Her room was quite well furnish-

ed with a single well-sprung bed and pretty green coverlet. There was hot and cold running water, a wardrobe and dressing table, and a window overlooking the Rue Bretagne. I felt at ease and safe as Vivienne turned the key in the lock, dropped her wrap and turned to me. In a moment I had enveloped her in my arms and felt her small sharp teeth biting passionately into my lips, then she pushed me away. "Let us have a drink," she said, and moved to a cabinet from which she took a bottle of cognac.

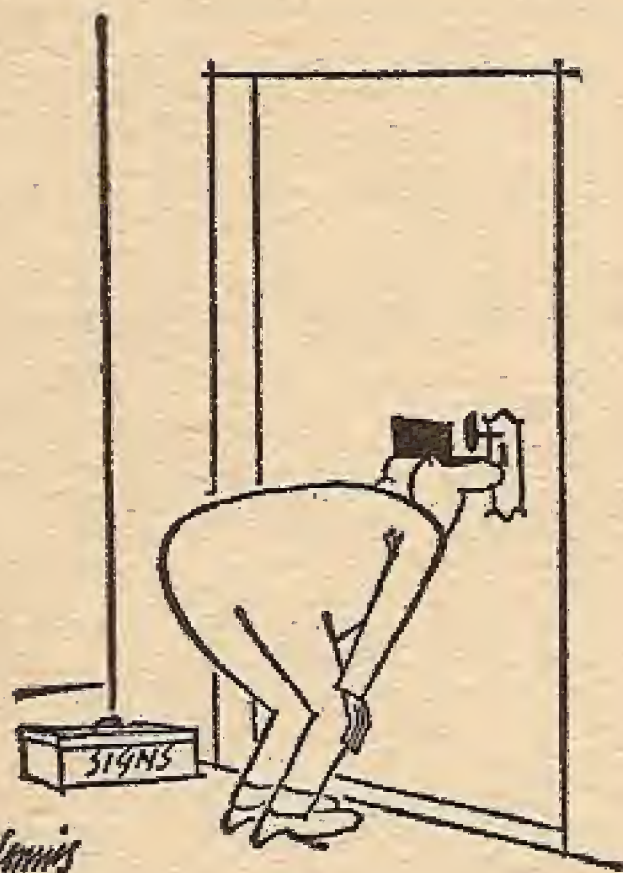
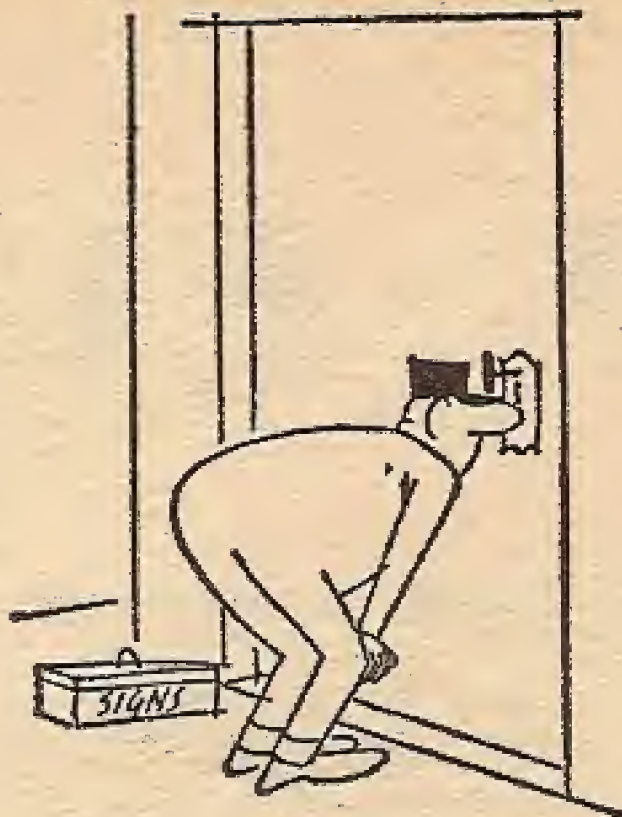
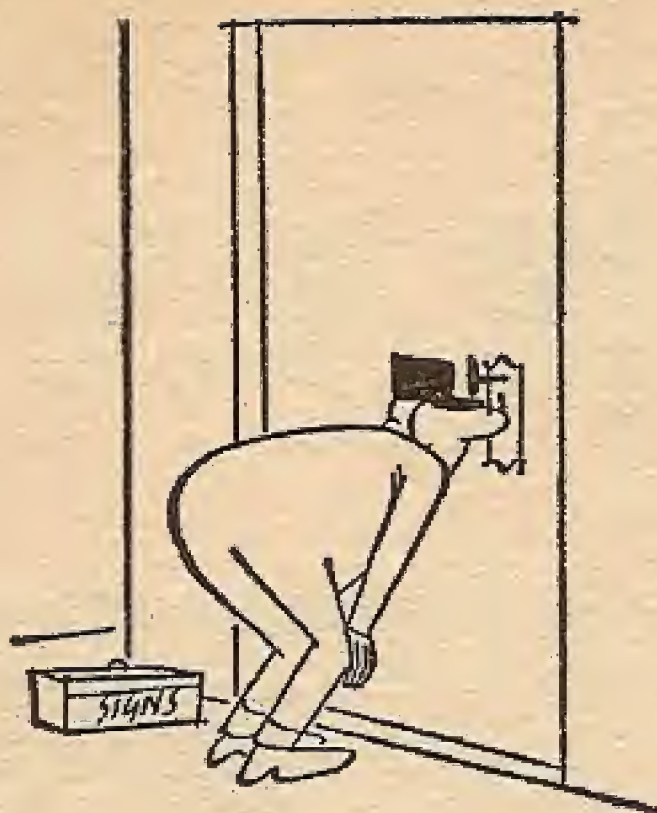
I watched her sinuous movements with mounting passion as she poured two generous helpings of cognac into two sparkling clear glasses. "You drink, cherie, while I go and change into something more comfortable."

I picked up the tall stemmed glass and said, "To you!" She smiled again, a coy half-inviting smile and moved to the wardrobe while I sat down on the only chair, a deep arm-chair, sipping at the cognac as I watched her undressing slowly, deliberately, like a woman who knows how to undress.

Exactly when the drink hit me between the eyes I don't know. I must have drunk about three-quarters of the two or three liquid ounces before I felt the room spinning around me. I tried to take a grip on myself. I felt the glass slipping from my fingers and fall to the floor. I vaguely remembered saying to myself, "She'll get small change out of me! I've only got about £15 on me. I never carry much money."

Then my world blacked out and when I started regaining my senses I felt the blackness around me, so thick you could put your hand out and touch it. One moment I rose on the crest of a wave and then I plummeted back into a bottomless pit as black as hell itself.

I had no recollection of how I got to be where I was or what had happened. I must have passed clean out from the doped drink. But why did the girl not follow the usual routine of Oran, rob me and have



roundings before the door immediately to my left opened outwards and two men I recognised at once as Algerians entered.

A tall man of 40 or so moved over and stood above me. He was bearded and dressed in a dirty khaki-coloured uniform and wore a Sam Browne belt and revolver in holster. He said in good French, "You are a French national?"

"I am French," I replied. "What do you want with me?"

"What is your name?" he continued ignoring my question and from his pocket took a notebook and pencil.

I told him my name. He wanted to know where my home was and I told him. Then he moved to the woman. I saw that she was maybe 25 years or so, a blonde who would have been very good looking except for the dirt and partly dried blood on her face. She told him that her name was Danielle Filuk. She was a French national from Perpignan in the district of Roussillon near the Spanish border and had been working as an assistant in an Oran jewellery store until kidnapped.

I noted that a man who lay near me was dressed in civilian clothes, but that another, still apparently unconscious, was dressed in the uniform of a private in the Foreign Legion. The Algerian kicked the man nearest me, the man in civilian clothes. He was the one who had been groaning so loudly and as the man struggled to sit up, swearing volubly in French, the Algerian demanded to know his name. The man told the Algerian that his name was Albert Quirie, a businessman from Marseilles on a business trip to Oran.

The Algerian finished making notes, then moved to the door and

her bodyguard, or pimp, remove me to be found drunk and robbed in some park?

"She was a damn fool," I said aloud, unthinkingly. "She took me to her room. I could and will take the police there after I have paid her a personal visit."

"Monsieur," I heard a woman's voice, "Monsieur, pouvez-vous me donner quelque chose contre a—" she lapsed into hysterical weeping.

I said, "What is it, Madame? How much pain have you? Can you come to me?"

The woman said in the jet black darkness, "I cannot come. I am tied up. I am in great pain. You can help me, yes?"

I said, "I am sorry, Madame, but I, too, am tied up. Where are we and why are we here?" I heard a loud groan from nearby.

"We are prisoners of the rebels," the woman said through her tears. "I think they mean to kill us."

My eyes were slowly becoming accustomed to the darkness. I could make out some forms on the floor that looked human in shape. I struggled to sit up although stabs of pain shot through my legs, arms and whole body with each movement. I wriggled my wrists a little but there was no flexibility in the thongs. I did not know then, but found out soon, that rawhide thongs made from camel skin were used to tie our wrists and ankles so that if we struggled they would tighten instead of easing off.

I called out, "Madame, if I move over to you, could you try to loosen my wrists?"

The woman said, "I will try, Monsieur."

I had just started wriggling my way on my backside toward the woman when a sharp stab of light flashed on. For a few seconds I was completely blinded by the brilliance of the incandescent bulb burning in the ceiling. I had another three or four seconds to take in my sur-



"Well, we've discussed politics, the weather, the news . . . now let's step out of the room one at a time and we'll talk about each other."

stood looking down at us.

"I am sorry," he said slowly but without a sign of regret in his voice, "that it has to be you, but you were the unlucky ones. We merely wished to make sure that you are French nationals. This man," he indicated the legionnaire, "does not matter for he is wearing the uniform of France and is therefore our enemy whatever his nationality. You are aware that one of our men has been sentenced to death in Marseilles for carrying out his duty in the furtherance of our cause to obtain freedom from you French. We are holding you people hostage against our man's life. If our man is guillotined you will be shot and your heads will be sent to the French Military Department as proof that we mean business. You will be set free the moment our man sets foot in Algeria and is freed by the French."

The Frenchman said, "You can't kill me. You will have the whole French Army down on you. Not one of you will live."

"Monsieur," the Algerian said coldly. "You are talking nonsense. We already have the whole French Army against us." The Algerian spoke in Arabic to his companion. I understand Arabic quite well and knew that he was telling the man to ease our bonds a little.

"I will pay you," Albert Quirie said plaintively. "I am quite rich. I will pay you well to set me free."

The Algerian shrugged helplessly as he said, "This is not a question of money, Monsieur, but of a man's life. We must use all the means at our disposal to have our own men."

"Will you at least free us from these bonds?" Danielle Filuk pleaded. "My arms and legs are very sore."

"I have already given instructions, Mademoiselle, for this to be done, but in case any of you thinks of getting away, let me tell you that you are in a basement far under a street in Oran in a building which the police and army will never suspect. You cannot escape and if you try, you will be killed and other prisoners will be taken to be held as hostage," the Algerian warned. The man and his companion marched out. The light was extinguished and we were alone, with our bonds still tied, for about 10 minutes when the light came on again and with a grating of a key and churning sound of a lifting bar the door was swung open.

Four Algerians marched into the room. One jerked me erect and another jerked Quirie to a sitting position. A third man handled the woman more gently as he helped her to sit erect against the wall. Then two dragged the legionnaire into the centre of the floor of the room, which I reckoned was about 12 feet by 14 feet, quite a large room, but windowless except for a grating high in the far side wall through which some air filtered.

The same bearded Algerian walked into the room and stood just inside the doorway. "I am a captain in the Algerian national army," he said. "I have orders from my superiors to execute this man,"



"Second act on in ten minutes . . . slip into these costumes . . ."

he indicated the legionnaire who was lying partly on his side, his eyes wide open, staring up at the Algerian. "We have to prove to the French Military Department that we are not bluffing, that we have you people as prisoners and that we will carry out our threat unless our man is returned safely to us. You will each write a note which I will dictate to the Military Department telling them that you are our prisoners, that you witnessed the execution and decapitation of this legionnaire and that we have told you that you will likewise be executed and decapitated unless our man is set free."

The Algerian barked an order and the four men closed in on two sides on the legionnaire. One man had a revolver in his hand and knelt on the floor and pressed the muzzle against the soldier's head at the base of the skull.

As the legionnaire struggled with his bonds, Danielle Filuk screamed, "You can't kill a man in cold blood like this! How do you hope to help your people by murder? I shall testify against you one day. I shall see you shot!"

The Algerian captain barked an order and the gun spat a leaden slug into the soldier's head. His body jerked but the bonds did not yield. For a moment or two the body twitched, then relaxed. The

captain snapped another order and one of the men produced a long-bladed two-edged dagger-like knife, severing the man's throat. The French woman screamed and then sagged back.

I felt sick and wanted to vomit and tried closing my eyes against the brutal sight, but I did not have enough willpower. I was forced by some kind of hypnotic trance to watch the final beheading. Quirie, I saw out of a corner of my eye, was watching with mouth sagging open, saliva dribbling down his shirt and jacket front.

The captain snapped another order and I saw one of the men, with the dagger dripping with blood, slice through the bonds which held the woman's ankles together and then cut through her wrist bonds. The man came to me and freed my hands and legs and then freed those of Quirie.

"I shall be back in a few minutes with the paper and pencil for you to write your notes," the captain said. "I shall then also have this person's body removed."

As they marched from the room and slammed the door, the light went out. I crawled over the floor, still suffering the agony in my half-dead wrists and legs and a splitting head from the doped drink, until

(Continued on page 40)

THE SILENT TIGER

Big, bullying Gant goaded Grenfell at every opportunity. Still, the newcomer wouldn't fight . . . till the day he showed us why he had refused . . . and Gant lay at his feet, his face smashed to a pulp by those terrible tearing fists.

IT was a typical, blue-hot island day when Grenfell stepped off the boat from the mainland. His shirt was open down to his waistline, his coat hooked by one finger over his shoulder, his other hand holding an overnight bag.

He was a big man, beautifully proportioned, flat-bellied, wide-shouldered, slim-hipped. He walked slowly down the jetty, looking from side to side at the prawning boats, the drying nets, his nostrils dilating a little to the smell of tar, salt and prawns.

He looked like a man coming back to a familiar place, and standing there watching him, I knew he was a saltwater man returning to a life he knew.

And suddenly studying him as he sat on the breakwater rolling a cigarette, I felt there was something familiar about him—as if I had known him in another environment far removed from the fresh smell of the sea and the wind across the Passage.

I came across and sat down, too.

"Good day!" I said. "Welcome to Gannet Island. I'm Jim Doherty. Run a prawn trawler out of here."

"Day, mate!" He tossed over the makings and I rolled a smoke. "I'm Les Grenfell . . . from Newcastle."

The impression that I had seen him before was edging more strongly into my consciousness.

"Never been up this way before," he went on. "Though I've worked on prawners."

"I reckoned you had."

I drew hard on the smoke, silent a minute. Then:

"I feel I've seen you before somewhere."

He looked at me quickly.

"You might've . . . Ever been down Newcastle way?"

"On'y passed through. It was somewhere else, though."

And suddenly I seemed to hear the sullen roar of a big crowd in the distance . . . a picture came: a man stretched out on the canvas of a squared ring, flat on his face; another man, in a corner, men's hands on his shoulder, restraining him.

Now at last the impression was

more than that. It was knowledge, sharp and clear.

"You're 'Fisty' Magee," I said. "Rushcutters Bay, 1958 . . . Bernie Hanlon wasn't expected to live."

There was a tiredness about his eyes now . . . a resignation.

"So?"

"So nothin', mate. I just called you to mind, that's all. Troubles me when I can't place a joker I've seen some place. I was down south on holidays when I saw that fight. Later on I met you at a party at the Cross. You were good, Les."

"That was 1958, Jim," Grenfell said. "After the Hanlon fight I gave it away for good . . . drifted west for a while . . . even up the Isa. Headin' back south unless I pick up a job round here."

"I need a boatman," I told him. "You look like you know your way around a trawler. My last man quit; gone up to Rum Jungle."

"Thanks, Jim. I'll take it. Er—Les Grenfell's my real name. 'Fisty' Magee's dead. Leave him be, Jim. No talk around the pub. See?"

I couldn't see, really. "Fisty" Magee had been one of the best of the young crop of heavies, and 1958 had been a vintage year. Why he should want to hide it, I didn't know, but I wasn't a yakkity man, and if he wanted it kept quiet, then that was his business.

"Just one thing, Les: why did you retire? You were goin' to the top of the heap—fast."

"That's dead, too, I hope, with 'Fisty' Magee. After I nearly killed Hanlon, I just up an' quit. Let's leave it at that, eh?"

"Sure, Les."

"Thanks, mate. Where's this boat of yours?"

"The 'Island Queen'. There she is, over there."

"Nice job, Jim. You've got yourself a boy."

I showed him over her, and when we came back, we walked along the beach to my weatherboard house back from the salt flats.

There was a man working the yabbie banks when we came along: a big man, and more heavily built than Grenfell.

A girl was with him; a girl in

very short shorts, flimsy bra top, sticking up and out with the young urgency of her thrusting breasts. She had long, slim legs, flat stomach, and shapely thighs.

She stopped Grenfell in his tracks.

"Who's the crow, Jim?"

"Vinnie Tremayne. She's Joe Gant's girl. That's Joe Gant. Runs a trawler, too. Sells bait an' rents boats on the side."

She was looking at Grenfell, too—hard. She met his stare head on, and liked it, because she knew he was looking at her as a woman.

"Danger bait, Les," I said.

"Yair, I've seen 'em like that before. They come knockin' on the door of your pub bedroom. You don't even know 'em."

And now Big Joe Gant was staring, too.

"Joe's girl, you said?"

"Joe's . . . Jack's . . . Tom's! Any big, goodlookin' joker with a body on him. On'y she don't get much chance to play with Joe around. Joe's tough, Les . . . on'y I don't reckon that'll worry you."

And suddenly he went funny again. He looked away from the girl quickly, and walked on in silence. It seemed as if with the mention of possible trouble with Joe Gant he had lost interest in the girl.

I settled him in the back room of the weatherboard house. He hadn't much gear with him, except a change of clothes in the overnight bag.

"I can let you have a bit of stuff," I told him. "You won't need much more'n a pair of shorts to work in. You can pick up some more duds in the township tomorrow."

* * *

In the morning we worked on some net repair jobs on the beach. It was a lovely, blue-golden day, and Les Grenfell drank it all in, glad to be back within the sight and smell of the sea.

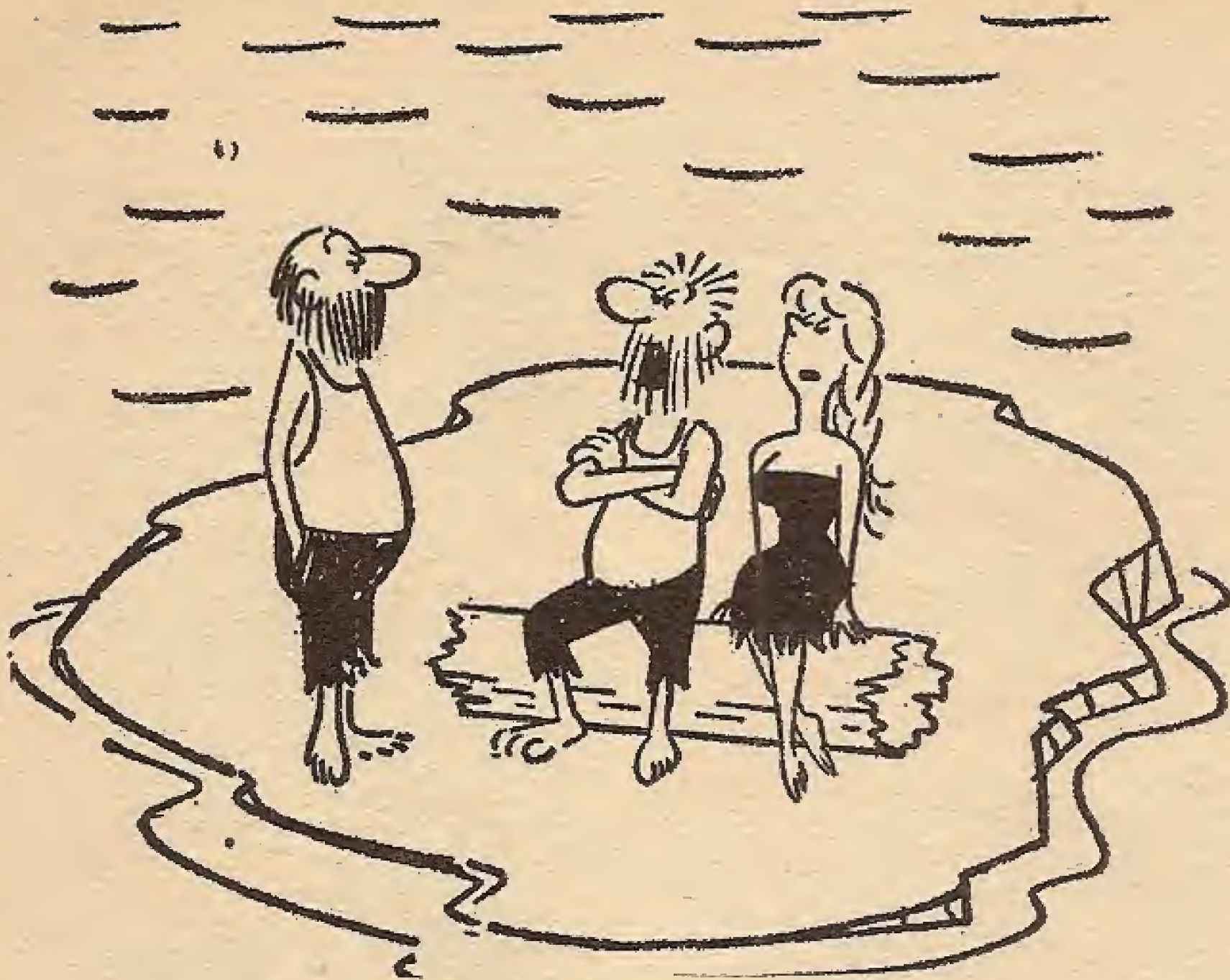
It was inevitable, of course, that Vinnie Tremayne should come around. I should have expected it, new man and all. There was little left to attract her in an old bleached and pickled herring like me.

So she came along that morning, her slim, marmoreal body aglow with vitality, her black eyes twinkling, avid for Grenfell.

He had his back to her, working on the net. I knew even by the look of his back that he was trying hard not to turn round.

She sat down on a packing case,





"Why don't you get lost?"

swinging one bare leg, the other clasped by her hands. She looked fiercely provocative—and I wished there was some alchemy that would shed the years from me.

"How are they runnin', Jim?" she asked me, watching the muscles ripple on Grenfell's bare, tanned back as he worked at the net.

"Fine, Vinnie," I said. Then I added, pointedly: "Where's Joe?"

"Over on Ugarie Beach." She frowned at my mention of him. "Who's the new boy?"

"Les—Les Grenfell. Hey, Les, gal here wants to meet you."

He stood up and turned, coming over, taking her all in.

"This is Vinnie Tremayne. You saw her yesterday on the beach."

"Yair," Grenfell said. Hi, Vinnie!"

"Hi, yourself!" The way she said it, it was almost a caress. "Where you from, daddyo—right out of a dream boat?"

She had the devil with her now—and right there in front of me, he was climbing on Grenfell's shoulder.

"Newcastle, originally. Then Sydney—an' then points west an' north."

"Settle, daddyo—settle! Gannet Island needs you."

"I reckon I might, Vinnie, if Jim don't fire me the minute we go over the bar."

"Jim needs a good boatman. The years have snuck up on him."

Her tone of voice discounted me in the way the young discount those so much older.

"Jim says you're Joe's girl."

Her toe drew a circle in the sand.

"Reservations, Les?" she flicked at him. "Don't tell me; let me guess. You've on'y been here two shakes of a hardihead's tail an' you're worried about Joe Gant."

He flushed. She was enjoying herself.

"I'm not worryin'."

She gave him the full treatment.

"Well, then?"

"I'll see you around, Vinnie."

The girl laughed on a low note—moved off down the beach.

"You will, dad—you will."

She came around plenty after that, and just when I got the idea that Les Grenfell was seeing her I didn't quite know. I suppose it was when he came home late the first time, humming a little tune. The second time he came home late I was sure of it.

It was a Saturday night, and I'd been in on a poker game with the net fishermen down on the flats. I wasn't yet in bed.

As he passed me I caught a faint suggestion of the skin perfume she used to pretty up for her dates. Apple Blossom, I think it was, and she used a lot of it, and its perfume clung.

So in the morning I said:

"Vinnie got you in, Les?"

"Yair, I'm seein' her, if that's what you mean. We had the launch out for a spin to the mainland. Some nights we go swimmin' on Ugarie Beach."

"She's a lot of fish, Les—barra-cuda fish."

I left it at that, but he wasn't at his best in the morning, so he cracked back with:

"Okay, Jim, say it! Say she's Joe's girl, an' I'm holdin' a shark by the tail. So what the hell?"

"I ain't sayin' anythin', Les. You're talkin'. Not me."

"Joe Gant got me scared, or somethin'?"

"I don't know, Les. Has he?"

I hadn't meant anything by the last bit, but suddenly I saw it had gone home, under his skin. He seemed to be awfully touchy on that



"You and your 'Let's build a little home of our own' patter . . ."

subject, almost as if, by making an issue of it, he was trying to convince himself that he wasn't afraid of a showdown with Gant.

But I couldn't see why it was even humanly possible that he was chary of facing such a physical issue. True, Joe was good with his fists; he was big, fit and strong, but then, two-three years back, Les Grenfell had been knocking on the doors of all the Australian top-flight heavies, and his retirement from the ring would in no wise have minimised his own particular fistic skill.

He hadn't gone to seed, he was still young; he was still more or less the man he was when he was knocking over the best of them.

I let it ride. It was all very peculiar, but I didn't want problems over the morning cup of tea.

It all boiled up that night in the bar of the local. Grenfell and I strolled down after tea for a couple of cold ones and we were halfway through the second round when Joe Gant and his boatman came in.

Joe had been drinking earlier in the afternoon, and he was in an ugly mood. Grenfell saw him come in, and half-turned his back, still talking to me and a couple of net fishermen from the flats.

Gant saw him at once, and moved up closer along the bar, bringing his drink with him.

"Hello, Jim." He spoke to me, but he was watching Grenfell. "Hear tell your new boatman does a lot of night swimmin' over on Ugarie."

So it was coming. I sighed wearily. I'd seen it all so often when anybody looked at Vinnie Tremayne. Nobody did . . . now, except Grenfell, the unknown quantity.

"I wouldn't know, Joe." I told him. "Just so's he's there when I put to sea of a mornin' is all I care."

Grenfell was peering into his drink.

"He has company, too, Jim," Gant went on, still needling. "A pretty girl, Jim . . . my girl!"

And so now it was out.

Slowly Grenfell turned, and faced Gant over his glass.

"You got anythin' to say, Joe, you tell me."

"So he talks at last." Joe Gant grinned. "You're new around here, tall boy. Hasn't anybody given you the score on Vinnie?"

"I got the message, Joe. So damn much I could set a tune to it."

"Then you know what happens to jokers who put their long bills into what don't concern 'em."

I could see there was a restraint on Grenfell, imposed on him by some inner force. There was anger in his eyes, but it wasn't showing in his voice, which was low and quiet.

"I can guess."

He turned his back on Gant, and went on talking to me. There was a little white circle about his nose, and his nostrils were flaring



now, but his voice was still calm and his hands steady as he rolled a cigarette.

It was obvious now that he wasn't going to accept Joe's challenge, and I couldn't help wondering if he were afraid. But that couldn't stack up—not with Grenfell's earlier ring record. He'd had some hard, savage fights. Any one of the tough ones would have brought out the white feather.

Maybe the fact that he'd almost killed young Hanlon was holding back. Many fighters lost their sting after a ring accident. Subconsciously you pulled your punches . . . watered down the killer instinct that's so necessary for championship class. You slowed up when you had your man groggy . . . you thought it could happen again.

Perhaps that was Grenfell's trouble. I didn't know. All I knew was he was side-stepping big Joe Gant, and that the rakehell fishing crews wouldn't respect him any more.

Pity . . . he was a good boatman.

So I talked back to him, pretending nothing had happened.

I heard Gant laugh . . . and then his hand fell hard on Grenfell's shoulder, twisted, and spun Gren-

fell round to face him.

At the same time his other fist was on the way to Grenfell's face.

Grenfell moved in a blur of speed. His left hand shot up like a striking snake, hand open. There was a smack as Gant's fist landed in Grenfell's open palm. His hand closed, gripped to power-packed whiteness . . . and there was a moment of immobility as strength met strength.

Their bodies tensed, almost quivered, and then Grenfell's smooth, trained power forced Gant's hand and arm inexorably toward his body.

Then he let go and stood facing Gant, cold and calm.

Gant's mouth opened like a stranded fish. He didn't say a word as Grenfell moved toward the bar door.

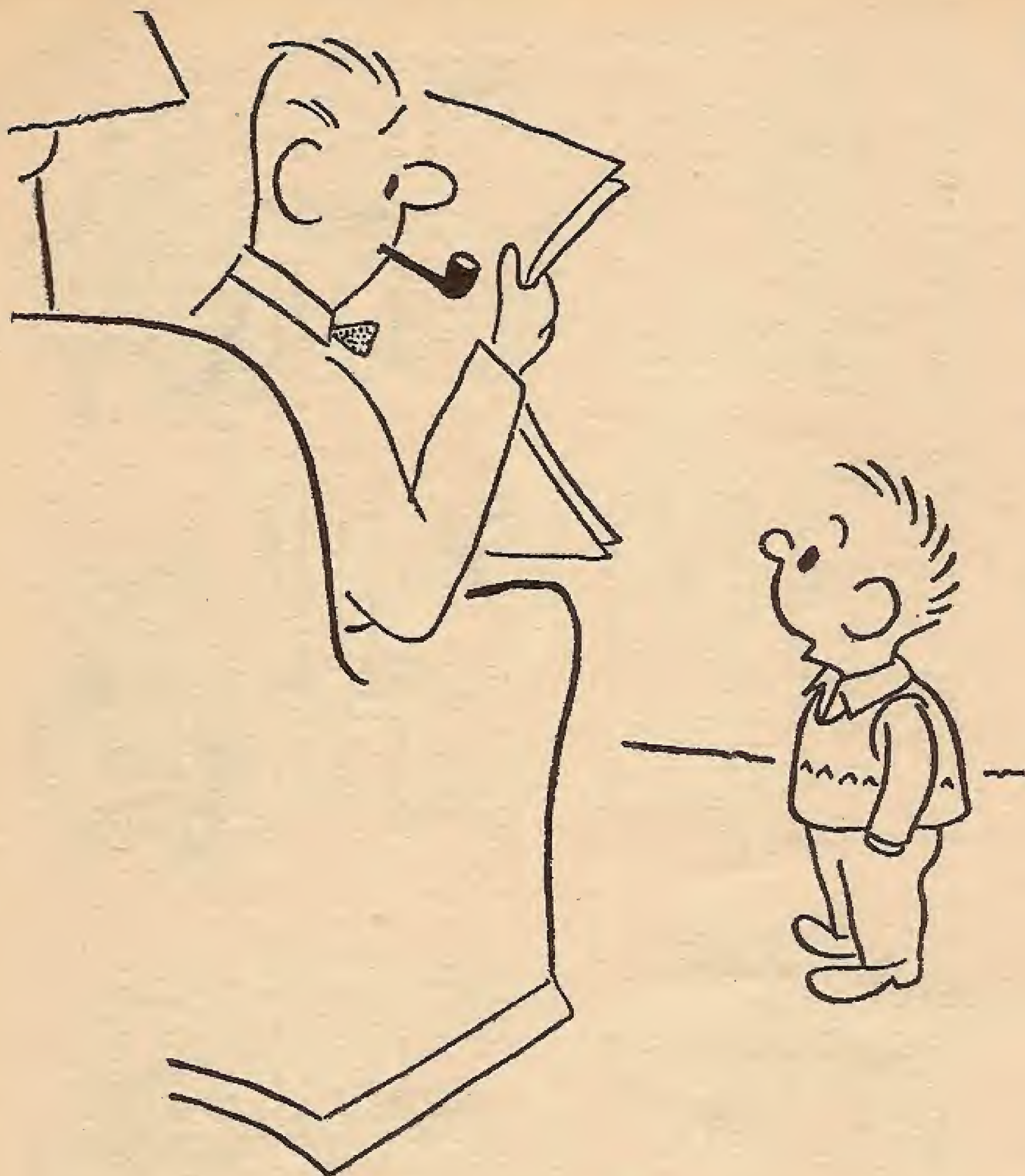
At the swing of the flaps, he got his voice back.

"You'll keep, boy, you'll keep!"

I saw then that his fingers were still closed, still paralysed by the force of Grenfell's amazing grip.

The bar door flaps swung to and fro behind Grenfell as he crossed the low verandah of the pub and down the few steps.

Vinnie Tremayne was standing on



"Well, if the stork didn't bring me then, how did you spend your honeymoon, reading?"

the footpath, her eyes on Grenfell. There was an insolence about her as she stood there, staring at him. It was obvious she'd been waiting for the outcome of Gant's facing of Grenfell.

Grenfell didn't speak . . . moved past her and crossed the road.

Gant came out on to the low verandah of the pub, and Grenfell heard his voice, sharp and clear:

"He chickened out . . ."

Grenfell could feel the eyes of the watchers touching his back with little jolts of psychological electricity and hear the broken record inside his head:

"He chickened out . . . he chickened out . . ."

On top of it all, there was Vinnie Tremayne, laughing on a high note.

At the end of the month we struck a good run of prawns in a patch on the eastern end of the archipelago on the top of Gannet Island, and we made some good hauls, which brought top prices.

Gant's hauls were not much above average at the time, and whether or not it was jealousy on his part, or just plain devilry, I don't know, but he began to include me in his campaign of baiting Les Grenfell.

Grenfell didn't go to the pub now. Gant was there with his boatmen,

and they always sought Grenfell out for their peculiar sense of ill-omened humor.

He didn't even go out at night, and so I wasn't surprised when he said one evening after tea:

"I'm pullin' out soon's you can get another man, Jim."

"I'm sorry, Les."

"Yair, me, too. This is a good place. We get on fine."

"Les, it'll be like this other places, sometimes, too, unless . . ."

"Yair. I know the drill. Gant's not unique. You don't have to tell me that."

"Well, then . . .? You've only to slap 'em down."

"It's not as simple as that, Jim. Just look around for another boatman, eh?"

In the morning early we put out for another run over our new patch, and Gant was following us at a distance as we moved out of the anchorage in the creek.

"We'll lose him in the archipelago, Les, an' then cut a wide circle to the grounds."

I gave the engine the gun, and we showed Gant a clean pair of heels. In the maze of little islands we finally lost him.

The ground was jumping with prawns and we filled the hold with one of the best catches of the season.

"Top price again for this lot, Les," I grinned. "Aren't you sorry you're leavin'?"

"Yair, I'm sorry, Jim. You've been a good mate."

We came back to the anchorage on Gannet later in the morning, with the catch iced down against the rising temperature, and I knew there was going to be trouble as soon as I saw Gant, his two bully boys, and of all people, Vinnie Tremayne, on the sedge-grassed flat back from the little stone jetty.

Grenfell tied up, and stood there, watching Gant as I leaped from the trawler to the stone decking of the pier.

Gant was grinning. At his feet was a full tin of kerosene.

"A full hold, Jim?" he asked, as Grenfell and I moved off the little jetty, walking slowly. There was that same little patch of white about Grenfell's nostrils.

"We had a good run, Joe," I said evenly. "You want somethin'?"

"You've been pretty cagy about that new ground you've been workin' in?"

"Not a new ground really, Joe. We happened to strike 'em a bit thicker on the last few runs."

I gave it to him quietly. I didn't want to precipitate anything at this stage—not with Gant and his two bullies . . . and Grenfell still an uncertain quantity.

Gant was in a cantankerous mood, with just enough steam up to make him dangerous.

"Them prawns you got iced down in the hold now—a dose of kerosene wouldn't improve their market value, would it?"

He was speaking quietly, needling me, looking at Grenfell occasionally to see how he was taking it. Grenfell made no move, standing there tense and still, his hands white-clenched at his sides.

Vinnie Tremayne and the other two stood off a bit, just watching. The girl's face was aglow with an expectancy that spread into her eyes, and I knew she was waiting for a clash between Gant and Les Grenfell. There was a slackness about her mouth I didn't quite like.

Gant hefted the kerosene and moved toward the entrance to the little jetty. He was completely sure of himself, of his own power backed by the two hangers-on.

It was a clean issue now: me, Gant, and Grenfell and the prize the iced-down catch in the hold of the "Island Queen".

I moved in front of him. He stopped, smiled thinly, and put down the kerosene.

"You're gettin' a bit long in the tooth for a roughhouse, Jim."

He was working himself into the mood now . . . and I knew I had no chance. I'd been too long on the beach.

My foot crashed against the side of the kerosene tin. It fell over, and the screw top was loose. The kerosene gurgled out and soaked into the sedge grass.

And then Gant hit me. I felt his fist go wrist-deep in my belly, and there was an awful sickness inside. My breath rushed out and I fell at his feet. In a maze of pain and breathlessness, I saw his foot go

back—and somewhere, deep in the mists, I knew he was going to slipper me.

You don't need that, Joe . . . you don't need the slipper for me.

Then, from a distance, I heard Grenfell's voice, cracking sharp and clear, like a whip:

"Gant!"

And the snap of it stopped Gant in his tracks. Slowly his foot came down and back.

There was Grenfell, tearing off his shirt, stripping to shorts and bare feet. There was Grenfell, stark and savage.

There, too, was Vinnie Tremayne, laughing quietly, without humour

"It's me you want, Gant—not Jim . . . not the prawns. It's been me, all the time."

"Yair, it's you, Grenfell."

He was tearing at his own shirt, as if afraid Grenfell would change his mind. It was all out in the open now: elemental, free of civilised trappings . . . and the atmosphere was almost a sigh of relief.

Gant threw the first punch: a long left that Grenfell got underneath, hammering two short ones, left and right, into Gant's middle, leaving two red marks. Gant moved forward, fast, bustling Grenfell, using his greater weight.

The beer hadn't yet given him a belly, and he was fit and strong, pickled like a herring with the salt from the sea. He had two punches on Grenfell's face now as Grenfell moved round him, boxing off a rush.

I had recovered somewhat, and I was on my feet, still sore inside, but well enough to see Grenfell's



"You bet I'll step outside and say that. Wait right here."



"Is this the one you're keeping Reverend Jackson on stand-by basis for?"

smooth power, his practised punching, and all the ring-trained skill of him.

Gant was good: I'd always known that. He had courage, too, and he'd

give Grenfell a run for it. There was a smile of satisfaction on his face, and I heard his voice, as they met in a clinch:

"So you can handle your dooks, Grenfell. No point in winnin' a fight against a man who can't use his hands."

Grenfell broke, and hammered the words away with a searching left. A following right came over fast, and Gant's head snapped back.

I don't know when it was I got the idea, but the fight wasn't five minutes old before I felt that Grenfell was enjoying it. It was in the look in his eyes, the intentness of his face; the eager way he came into Gant, chopping hard with left and right. He was turning his knuckles as they landed, to grip Gant's skin, and already the big man's face was coming apart.

Grenfell came at him in a two-fisted attack, and already Gant's top lip was open to the teeth from nostril to mouth, and there were gashes on both sides of his face. But Gant met him toe to toe, and they slugged out a fierce two minutes that would have had any fight crowd in the world roaring to its feet.

I had no brief for Gant, but I had to hand it to him: he had guts, and the instinct and will to fight, like a fierce animal. He was mean, with cruelty in him, and I had seen him dish out beatings to other men on the island, and I supposed he had a thrashing coming, but not even on Gant would I have wished one like this.

(Continued on page 50)

Whenever a rep-building killer hit town, Lawman Starker had always packed a hole card to back his bluff . . . But today, against this blazing-eyed young glory-hunter, he held only

THE

FICTION • LLOYD ERIC REEVE

IT HAPPENED about a mile south of town, just before noon. And it would have been a trivial enough thing at almost any other time.

What gave it importance was in what Frank North said, some 30 minutes afterwards, when John Starker rode up to the adobe jail office. Actually, as soon as he saw Frank loitering there in his splotchy white storekeeper's apron, Starker had a mild suspicion of something amiss, yet neither her nor Frank, himself, for that matter, showed it particularly as they talked casually a moment later.

All Frank said, when Starker had swung down a little awkwardly from his sweat-patched horse, was, "Ben Hogan's in town, John. Hot enough for you?"

"Could fry eggs on a flat rock," Starker said. With his left hand he jabbed up the rim of his flat-crowned California hat, and drew the backs of two fingers across his glistening forehead, shaking off beads of sweat with a snapping motion. "Where is he?"

"In the Bird Cage. Painting his tonsils with a little coffin varnish. Man sure can talk. Got his tongue hung in the middle so's he can wag it at both ends."

Starker grinned faintly. "Heard he was a talker. The young ones generally are. Don't always mean they're bluffers too, though."

"No," Frank said. "Already tallied a couple of notches on the handle of his persuader. Just varmints, I hear. Only trouble, it's gone to his head. Wants a town marshal now. Figures one like you can give him just the name he hankers for."

Starker sighed. "Lot of youngsters get themselves killed that way. All some of them need is a bit of taming. Thing is, you can't always figure which ones."

"This one's got some poison in him," North said. "Leastwise, if it was me, I wouldn't take chances."

"Sometimes," Starker mused, "not taking the chance is what a man can't afford. This young Hogan — word gets around. The way I hear, he got talking in some town down south a while back, and let his tongue run away with him again. Seems my name came up, and he says as how he could take me, and the next thing he knows he's saying as how he's going to take me. Having said it, he can't back down. Just painted himself into a corner. Well, we'll see. I'm obliged to you, Frank."

"Just thought you'd like to know," North said. "Anyway, stay out of the sun, John. Man could get a heat stroke, day like this." He sauntered down the wooden walk, back toward

the flat front of his heat-battered store.

Starker watched him go. Except the storekeeper's stocky figure, the boardwalks on either side of the dusty street were deserted, which might have been a little unusual at this hour, except that by now word had likely spread that young Ben Hogan was in town.

A moment longer Starker stood there, vaguely brooding, a tall, raw-boned man, not quite middle-aged, his drooping moustaches touched with iron-gray, and with quiet eyes from which all color had long ago been drained. His gaze lifted past the jail office to a small shack three doors down the street, where Doc Emery's weather-beaten shingle swayed with faint complaints in the vagrant and scorching breaths of air.

He'd meant to drop in on the doc before going into his own office. But now he questioned the impulse. This unexpected play had come up, and to talk with the doc now could force it prematurely, and in a way he was not yet sure he wanted. So, after another space, he just stepped across the walk and into the jail office. He sat down behind his cluttered desk, pawed through a drawer and found and lit a cigar. A good cigar always helped him think.

He didn't know how much time he had. Nothing might happen for hours. But then again the sudden challenge of Hogan's appearance in the street could come any minute.

It would be just horse sense, of course, to go at once to Doc Emery. That would settle everything. Though still not just in the way he would have it. This was his fourth trail town, and in none of them, so far at least, had the citizens who paid him had much to complain about in the way he kept their frontier version of law and order.

And without much killing, too. In fact the legend about his gun was grossly over-rated. For quite practical reasons he kept it to himself that he had sent to their maker only two of the dozen or more tallied to his credit. He wasn't particularly fast. Certainly he had none of Wild Bill's speed, or Buffalo Bill Cody's circus tricks, nor even the slow and deadly accuracy of Wyatt Earp. Yet Bill was dead, with a bullet in his back, Cody did all his shooting in fancy dress to band music, and his own towns had been as orderly at least as any of Earp's.

He'd long ago learned that calmness, and the impact of his own iron-veined resolution, and maybe just a sense of humor, was about as

trustworthy as any split-second draw or magic aim. He'd lost count of all the drunks and brash youngsters and even authentic badmen he'd faced, always with murder in their eyes, and still had walked them down and disarmed them. Sometimes at the last minute, of course, he'd had to slap a few alongside the head with the barrel of his six-shooter.

But always before, he had known he would draw and fire if it came to that. That he could kill. But, if it came to it today, could he kill young Ben Hogan? He didn't think so.

That was the difference. Always before he'd held a card or two if his bluff failed. A hole card. And today he didn't. He held nothing today, and he guessed only a fool would refuse to throw down his hand and wait out a better deal.

Well then, he thought, I'm a fool.

It wasn't so much what would be said about him later, if he walked out on it today. Because there would be those who would claim — there always were — that he had fashioned the whole excuse deliberately, out of whole cloth. Not that, but rather his own clear awareness that to back down even once would strip him forever of the fable of invulnerability. That, and just the disinclination to turning his back on something he had been hired to do, spreading a little peace in these scattered segments of the frontier through which his life was passing.

He finished the cigar and flipped it through the open door. It cleared the sidewalk and landed in the street with a small puff of dust. There was nothing do now but wait. He sat there, in the oven heat of the small office, without impatience, watching the sun silently blast the bleached dust of the street beyond the door, feeling the sweat soak his face and trickle out of his armpits and down across his ribs.

Presently he heard a faint clacking of bootheels against the boardwalk. They started distantly and grew steadily louder. He waited patiently, knowing it wouldn't be Hogan — not yet — but an emissary, for this was how it was done. A moment later a young cowhand surged around the office door and came inside, his eyes kindling a little with morbid excitement.

Starker's gaze was gently chiding. "Take it easy, son," he said. "Could spook a jumpy man right into shooting you, time like this. Got something in your craw?"

"It's Ben Hogan," the cowboy blurted. "Ain't you heard? He's in town."

GUN THAT FAILED

"I heard," Starker said.

"He sent me to tell you."

"Tell me what? That he's coming out?"

The cowboy nodded. "Says to tell you either fish or cut bait."

"All right, son," Starker said. "You've told me."

The cowboy hesitated, but as Starker said nothing further, asked, "You coming out and bracing him?"

Starker smiled faintly. "Let him figure that one out for himself, son. Do him good to think about it — or rather, maybe, do me some good. But it's a hot day, son. Better stay indoors a while. Ranting around outside this way you could get a heatstroke, or something, anyway."

The cowboy grinned. "That all you want me to tell him?"

"Yes," Starker said, and then, on impulse: "No, tell him I know he'll reach first, that his kind never have the nerve to wait a man out. Say it in a way to make him mad, son. You do me that favor."

The cowboy's eyes bugged a little. "You going to try to just walk him down?" he asked. "You try that and you'll get yourself killed sure. Hogan's bad."

"Yes," Starker said. "But not quite as bad as he thinks he is. Well, we'll see. Run along now and give him my respects, such as they are."

He kept walking and suddenly there was less than four feet between them.

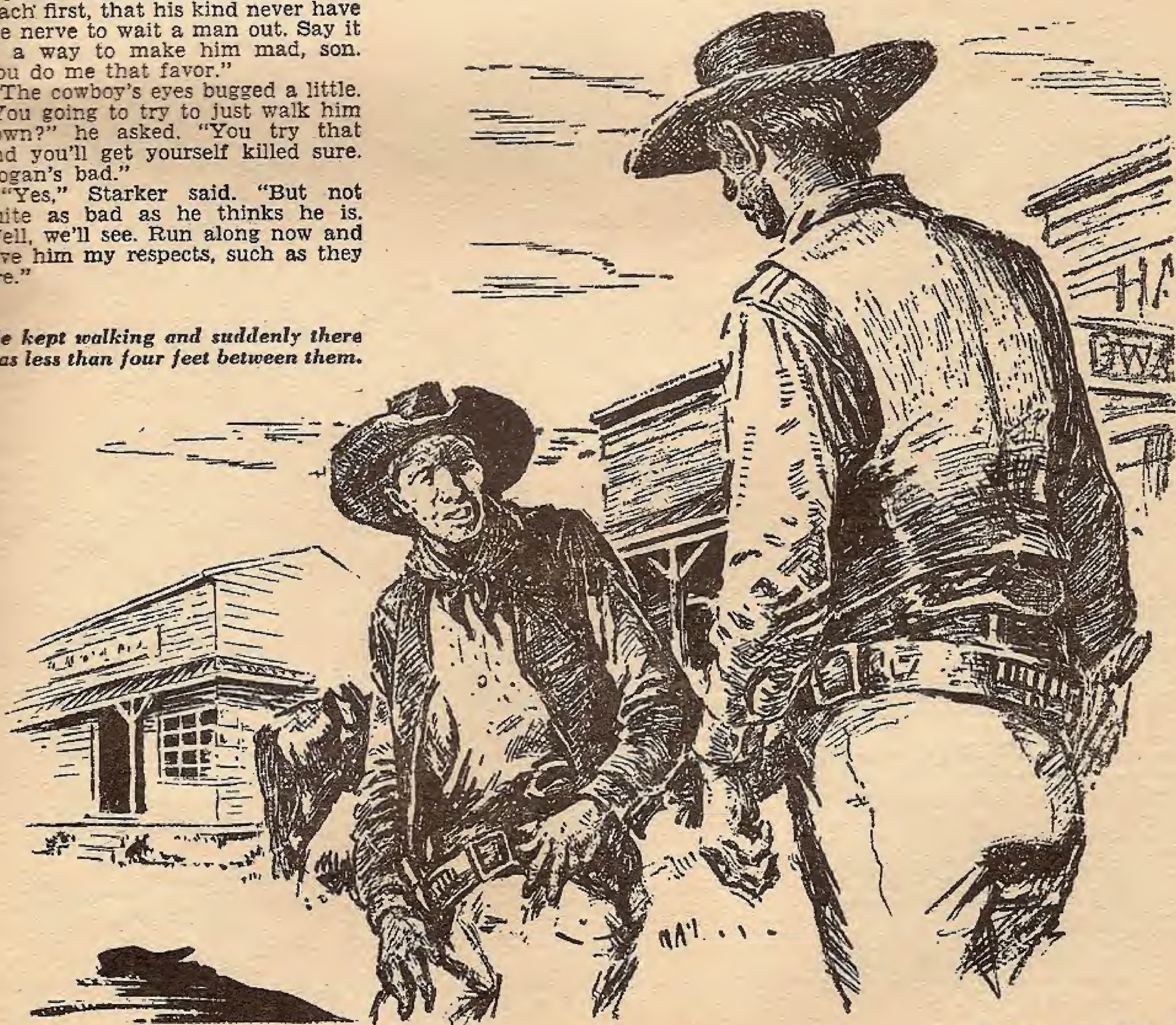
The cowboy left. For another moment Starker was motionless, letting a stillness grow within, and then he stood up slowly. He didn't pull and check his six-shooter or even ease it in its holster. He just moved to the doorway, a little stiffly, and stood leaning in it, looking down the street toward the Bird Cage Saloon. His eyes squinting against the iron glare of sunlight, he watched the cowboy crossing the street toward the saloon. The cowboy's boots jettied puffs of dust. He went around the hitchrack, where several cowponies stood, three-legged and with drooped heads.

Even at this distance Starker recognised the horses, and saw that one was alien, and knew that it would be Hogan's. The cowboy's

boots struck loudly across the wooden walk. He knocked open the saloon's batwing doors with a twisting lunge of his shoulder and went inside.

No life moved in the street now. Only a small swirl of dust, building up in a thin gust of heat, dodging about erratically for a minute, and then seeming suddenly to swallow itself. Somewhere distantly a cow bawled. A dog barked. Someone coughed once behind an open window, reminding Starker that at every window or doorway now, from all shielded vantage points, people were waiting and watching, unseen. He was detached now from the populace. Alone.

Five minutes must have passed, and then the batwing doors flapped suddenly, and Ben Hogan walked





"Lady, I don't see how I can take no for an answer!"

out. He stood on the sidewalk for an instant, craning his head toward the marshal's office, blinking his eyes into adjustment from the saloon's heavier dusk to the street's white and throbbing glare.

Starker waited in his office doorway's shrouding shadow. He had never set eyes on Hogan before, and yet somehow the man was clearly familiar, cloaked as so many before in a changeless violence, sensed by instinct as perhaps any natural enemy is always sensed.

A big youth, with a suggestion of massive strength sweating through his high and cat-footed leanness, and his hair, bushing out from under the battered sombrero, showing even at this distance its brash yellow color.

Letting the tension build in him, the marshal waited in that shadowed doorway. There was pain in his body. But he was scarcely aware of it. Hadn't been since Frank North had first spoken to him. The pain was only an inner thing, a bright core of hurt, serving only to centre and sharpen his impassive attention to this moment.

Hogan moved suddenly. He went into the street as though thrust there by a bursting of pent-up violence. He started forward with a slow, strutting stalk, like an angry rooster's, that sent back from his bootheels spaced little explosions of dust.

Still Starker waited, motionless, as Hogan came on some 50 feet. Uncertainty slowed him then. He came to a halt, eyes suddenly roving, lashing the empty street with suspicion. A little raggedly he hurled his voice at the jail office: "Starker! You coming out? Or do I come in after you?"

Another minute dragged, the marshal waited, and then he moved, almost casually, stepping from the doorway into full light. But he didn't walk into the street. Instead he sauntered down the boardwalk toward Hogan. Except for his right

arm, crooked slightly with mild threat, he might simply have been on his way to the saloon for a drink. So far he hadn't even looked at Hogan.

Glaring at him, Hogan seemed a little confused now. He turned sideways to face him, still idling along the sidewalk. He shouted at him, "Get into the street, will you? Can't you fight like a man? If you don't go for your gun, I'll—"

Starker spoke then, for the first time, his soft, flat voice carrying clearly through the hot hush. "Now mister," he said, "you don't have to yell like that. I'm not in the next county. Use up all your wind."

He stepped off the sidewalk, slanting toward Hogan, but still with that loitering matter-of-fact pace. His gaze, chiding and a little amused, seemed to hold Hogan lightly leashed. He walked toward him slowly, with the same caution he would approach a spooky young horse.

Some you could gentle. Some had to have the sense just beat into them. Only a few, the crazed killers, had to be done away with. But how could you ever tell which was which? Until too late.

Less than 30 feet separated them. Hogan's glare had dilated a little. A glassiness was coming into his eyes, and Starker watched this closely. Hogan's right hand poised like a claw above his gun. It quivered, and Starker spoke instantly.

"Now, son," he said, "I wouldn't if I was you. You know I'll drop you if you try it. I always can. But I'd as soon not. What you want to die for? You're young, boy, young. Think of all you got to do yet . . ."



"Now remember, when I tug on my ear you casually lift the hem of your skirt and dab it at your eyes."

All the time he talked he was sauntering closer. Only about 20 feet separated them now. He said, more sharply, "Anyway, you've waited too long. This close I couldn't help getting you even if you hit me first. Which you wouldn't."

He kept walking, unhurriedly, and yet suddenly there was less than four feet between them, with Hogan's wild glare drowning itself in the soft mockery of Starker's quiet dominance. And it was only then, at the last second, that Hogan's hand exploded toward his gun, as though finally tearing itself loose from the rest of an almost hypnotised body.

It slapped the handle of the weapon, clawing it up from the holster, and at the same instant Starker struck his wrist with a quick chop of his left hand. He knocked the gun aside just as it crashed flatly. The bullet spurted dust a few feet to one side, and Starker's fingers vised around the wrist with a hard twist. The gun fell from suddenly agonised fingers. Still scorning to use his right hand, Starker gave him a flat push against the chest, staggering him backward. Then he bent smoothly, scooping up the fallen gun, and straightened, letting it dangle loosely at his side.

None of the brash recklessness was left in Hogan's face. Nor even anger. He just looked silly and defeated. And somehow, too, almost relieved.

Starker's faint grin went a little bleak. "Now, son," he said, "I'm not sure I'm doing this right. Better sometimes just to get rid of the bad ones. Except you're not near so bad as you think. Might be you even got something worth saving. Anyway we'll chance it."

Hogan said nothing, and the marshal paused, considering. "Won't even stick you in the jailhouse to cool off," he finally decided. "No good for cooling off in this weather anyway. Son, why don't you just get on your horse and start going away from here. And don't come back. You wouldn't like it around here now, the way folks would kind of laugh. Reckon you'd be smart never to start any fights anywhere now, the way word will get around how you couldn't make this one stick. What I mean, just stop trying to be such a bad one, and you'll get along fine. All right, move along."

Young Hogan looked up, a little sulkily, and then he looked away. But a grin had almost started at the corners of his mouth. He turned abruptly, his feet shuffling some now, and walked back to the hitch rack. He climbed up on his horse and wheeled it away and rode slowly out of town. He didn't look back.

Starker, gradually conscious again of the pain within, watched him go. He was pretty sure Hogan would never again expose himself to this town's remembering grins. To tame them and still not break their spirit — all a man could do



"'Get out,' he said. 'Make me!' I said. And he did!"

was try, never sure he was right, but still having to do it in the only way he knew. He went back to the sidewalk and turned toward the jail office.

He heard a mumur of talk behind, as a small crowd seeped out of the Bird Cage now, but he didn't look back. His gaze found Frank North just ahead, standing in the door of his store, lounging behind his white grocer's apron.

Frank grinned at him. "Won't it ever cool off?" he complained. "That was a good job, John. Still, you're a fool, walking around in this sun. A heat stroke's bad."

"Come winter," Starker said, "we can change the subject. I might have done wrong, Frank, but I reckon I'm just not cut out to be a butcher." He went on, coming abreast of Doc Emery's shingle, three doors before his own, and he swerved, remembering, and the Doc, standing too in the doorway, looked surprised.

The Doc said, "I'd heard about your doing that, John, but never knew I'd live to see it." He stepped backward as Starker came inside. "It's what they call confidence, I guess. Never doubted for an instant

you could drop him if you had to, did you?"

"Well, maybe," Starker said. "Wanted to see you, Doc, before the interruption. Rode out to serve a process this morning. Got down on the way back to tighten the cinches. Slipped on a rock. Fool thing to do. Caught myself on my hand." He extended his right hand, still stiff and wooden in its movement. The doc took hold of the hairy wrist, his fingers probing, and Starker, wincing slightly, said, "Broke, ain't it?"

The doc cursed softly as he nodded. "Clean as a whistle," he said. "Why, you couldn't even have lifted your hogleg from its holster, let alone fire it. Here, I'll have to set this and get some splints on."

Starker's grin was faintly sardonic. "What was that, doc," he asked, "you was saying about confidence?"

Doc Emery was already at work on the wrist. He answered without looking up. "Well, hell," he said, "I still say it was confidence. Maybe that's a hole card any man has, if he just knows it. Confidence in yourself, John. Why, damn it to hell and gone, I say it more than ever now."



"Don't be silly . . . What's in it for me?"

ONE HOT NIGHT IN ORAN

(Continued from page 29)

I reached the woman and took her head from the floor and cradled it in my arm until she recovered her consciousness.

"They killed him! They killed him!" she kept repeating over and over again. "I saw them murder the poor man."

I spoke softly to her, tried to calm her and presently she settled in my arm, sobbing but more composed. It was more than half an hour before the captain and two Algerian rebel soldiers appeared. Meanwhile the corpse of the legionnaire lay headless in the dark somewhere just at my feet. I tried not to think of it and not to think that exactly the same thing would happen to us, but somehow I was not afraid. I know that I should have been afraid, but fear was something I did not experience just then.

I have heard it said that shock

will drive fear from a man's mind. I must have been in some kind of shock for although I knew well enough that the French Government would never surrender the rebel lying under sentence of death, I was not afraid at that moment.

When the door opened again, the captain and five men walked into the room. Two of the men removed the corpse and the captain handed each of us a sheet of paper and pencil and dictated the brief note which we had to write to the Military Department and to sign. Then a man appeared carrying a small folding camera with a flashlight attachment and took a picture of each of us where we sat against the wall.

"If they think we are bluffing, they will have to think again tonight," the rebel captain said. "For tonight they will receive your letters and your photographs attached to them as proof that we have you, and also the head of their paid mercenary. He was not a Frenchman. His paper showed that he was another European. A man who fights another country's battles must expect to die as he

did. He deserves no better. We will presently bring you some food. You will not be badly treated while you are here if you do as we say."

The room was in darkness again. It was odd to me that we could hear nothing—no footsteps, no voices—once the door was closed. I figured that it must be a very thick door.

"What are we going to do?" Danielle Filuk asked. "We cannot just sit here and allow them to kill us."

I said, slowly, "I don't know, M'mselle. There doesn't seem to be much that we can do except hope."

We lapsed into silence. There was nothing to say, nothing to do except sit there. I felt sick by the sight that I had seen. I realised that this was all out war with no quarter given or asked. The Algerians were indiscriminately killing French and even other white people in a hope that by bringing about enough terror they would force the French to give them independence. I had stumbled right into it because I had picked up a pretty girl in a cafe nightclub, something any man might do.

I knew for a fact that the Algerians were not fooling, and that they would kill us and behead us. They had to do it, there was no other way that they could prove to the French military authorities that they meant business and that their threats would be carried out.

It was very small comfort to know that when the Algerians responsible for the death of the legionnaire—and for our deaths—were caught they would be executed. It wouldn't bring us back to life. But there seemed to be nothing at all that we could do to help ourselves. I took a spot check of Mademoiselle Filuk and Monsieur Quirie to find out if they had any kind of weapons. They had nothing.

I was leaning up against the wall and Danielle Filuk was sitting up against my right shoulder with my right arm around and helping to support her. She was quiet, perhaps deep in thought. We did not move or say anything again until about an hour later when the light came on and an Algerian brought a bucket and tin mug to the room. Another man, with a revolver in his hand, stood guard in the door while the first man placed the bucket in the room. He said, in Arabic, "Soup."

When they left the light remained on. I was hungry and drank some of the watery soup although it was unsalted, a tasteless soup, little more than dishwater. Danielle and Quirie would not have any even though I told them that they should have some as it might help restore a little of their strength. Some time afterwards Danielle crawled to the bucket and drank two mugsful, but Quirie had none of it.

The hours were endless. Although the light was on in the room, we did not know whether it was night or day or what time it was. Danielle told me that she had come from the store at closing time and just as she began walking along the busy

sidewalk, a car parked ahead of her began moving slowly. Two men suddenly closed in on her, the door was flung open and she was hustled into the car and sped off at high speed.

Danielle settled in my arm and made herself comfortable. I felt myself dozing off and did not fight it. My brain was overtired and I reckoned that if time allowed and if I could catch a little sleep I might think of something when I awoke.

I was awoken, however, by Danielle shaking me. Quirie, I saw, was lying curled up on the floor like a cat, asleep. "I have thought of something, Monsieur la Brecque," she said. "Can't we attack the men when they return? I could attack one and you another."

I smiled. I said, "I have thought of Quirie and I tackling them, but they'd kill us before—"

"You have not thought of me, Monsieur," the woman said. "They were watching you and that man all the time. They did not watch me."

There was much in what she said. "If we get killed," I said, "we haven't much to lose, have we? It only means dying a little sooner than we otherwise will. What do you plan, M'mselle?"

"I am not bad looking," she said, and I looked at her dirty, smudged and blood-caked face. "If I take off some of my clothes—to make a pillow!—and clean my face: you see, Monsieur, can a man fail to look at a half-dressed woman?"

I smiled although God knows I felt far from smiling just then. "You are right, M'mselle," I said.



"Some of us here are trying to forget, Pierre!"

They would be attracted to her, I knew. I saw the possibilities. I called Quirie and told him roughly what we planned.

"No, no, no," the French businessman exclaimed. "No, I will not be killed by some crazy plan. The soldiers are certain to look for us and to find us. We will be saved."

"Monsieur Quirie," Danielle said. "You do not know the rebels. You have not been here long. We will

be dead and our heads delivered to the authorities long before the authorities will start looking for us. Oran is big, the French have many troubles here. Is it not better to die fighting than to die like a rat in a trap without putting up a fight?"

Quirie was silent for a few minutes, then said, tiredly, "What must I do?"

"Help Monsieur La Brecque when he goes to work. Watch him and act only when he does," Danielle said.

She disrobed until she stood in a brassiere and pantie. She had a good figure, well filled and full, the kind of figure any woman would like to have. I took her stockings and dipped them in the soup and then cleaned her face.

When I was finished wiping all the smudges and blood from her face she looked another woman altogether, attractive and almost chic. Right next to the door she laid her dress full length and folded her underclothing into a roll as a pillow, then she deliberately removed her brassiere and laid it neatly next to the pillow. She lay down on her back, stretched out, completely naked except for the pantie.

Then she said, looking at the high ceiling, "Messieurs, I have for the moment done my part. Let us hope that we can get away."

Another hour passed. My thoughts kept returning to the attractive and most desirable form of Danielle Filuk. Yet there were more important things at the moment than love even though love is proverbially a Frenchman's meat, bread and drink.

I was sitting on the floor against the wall on the other side of the door. The door was about two feet six inches wide and this was the only distance that separated Danielle from me. Quirie sat against



WOW-

"I see your mother's come to visit us again!"



Obrien

"You said my sweater and tight skirt distracted you!"

the wall directly opposite the door. We were tense and keyed up as we waited for something to happen. I guess all three of us knew that our chances of successfully overpowering two or three guards were negligible, still we were willing to try. A man will do anything when facing certain death.

An electric tension hung in the air and reached explosive point as we heard the key grate in the door. Then the lifting of the bar which apparently covered the door. Danielle looked at me and nodded. She did not smile, she raised her shoulders a fraction to make her busts more pendant, more appealing in their fullness. Quirie looked at me and sat with pinched lips, pretending to be asleep, his eyes half closed but watching.

An Algerian moved into the room toward the bucket. I watched the other man on guard at the door. He had glanced at me as they entered, now his eyes were feasting

on Danielle. I could almost read his mind as he gloated over her white body. I saw him grow tense, I could feel the passion welling up in him. I dived at his feet. He crashed over the naked woman, the revolver flew from his hand, and Quirie simultaneously dived at the other man who had turned his back on Quirie also to feast his eyes on the woman.

I had my right arm under the man's chin, on his windpipe. I felt Danielle crawl from under us, I heard a crunching sound as something flashed past my face and the Algerian grew limp in my arms. I saw a blurred movement as the woman swung the revolver down and smashed the skull of the man fighting with Quirie. It happened so fast that it would not be possible to give a blow by blow account.

I stood panting, next to me Quirie said hoarsely, "Let's go, quick." Danielle was slipping the

dress over her head. I rummaged through the dead Algerians' pockets looking for another revolver, but found only a dagger which I gave to Quirie. "Remember," I whispered as we stood in the doorway, "you must kill or be killed. You cannot speak or ask questions. Kill anyone who gets in the way."

I checked the revolver. It had only four cartridges then I nodded at Danielle and Quirie and led the way up the narrow stairs which led straight down from somewhere above to the door of the basement.

A beam of light shot into the hole up which the steep stairway led. I saw above a square and assumed that the stairs led to a trapdoor. I was right. As I came almost with my head by the trapdoor I listened carefully but could hear nothing. Cautiously I poked my head over the top and saw that we were in a kitchen. At least, there was an old coal stove, a hearth and kitchen sink and utensils but it did not seem as if the kitchen had been used for a long time. There was a window and door, but the door was closed.

As I got to the floor and waited for the others I heard the sound of voices beyond the door. I moved silently to the window. It was night time and dark outside. I could distinguish some kind of building which seemed to be about 20 to 30 feet behind the kitchen window.

I craned my neck to look down but could not see how far above the ground we were. I guessed though that we must be on the ground floor because of the basement and studied the window for a few seconds. It was filthy and had not been cleaned for years. There was a single catch which locked the upper and lower windows together. I tried it, but it was solid with grime and dirt. I motioned Quirie to give me the dagger and scraped carefully around the latch and then tapped it lightly until it began to move, then I moved it aside with my thumb and forefinger.

Time was running out, I knew. Someone might come from beyond the door at any second to find out why the two guards were taking so long collecting the bucket.

The window would not budge. I had not expected that it would, and ploughed into its frame with the dagger to free one of the panes of glass so that I could get a grip in the frame to shove it upwards.

It began to budge, but slowly with a loud creaking noise, then, suddenly it shot upwards and crashed against the upper framework. I thrust Danielle into the window as I whirled to face the door, expecting someone to come charging through it. I did not see Quirie go but heard him whisper behind me, "Come, Monsieur!"

I was soaked with sweat, reluctant to turn my back on the door. As I swung my legs over the window sill the door opened. A man appeared in it. I caught a fleeting glimpse of his face, I saw fear and shock on his swarthy Arab face. I squeezed the trigger and almost saw the bullet plough into his chest,

then I dropped and fell as my feet struck some obstruction. I heard Danielle yell, "This way!"

I raced after the sound. From the window shots echoed through the backyard. I tripped over some rubbish, jumped up and ran. In front of me I saw Quirie and in front of him Danielle. She had reached a wall and was scaling it. I dropped down the other side as bullets smacked into the wall. We hesitated for a moment. The lane-way in which we stood ran two ways. Which way should we go? Quirie decided it by starting to run westerly. We followed. Behind us we heard shouts and screams and sounds of men running. We could see nothing except the walls in the darkness. We might be running into a dead end to be trapped and shot down by the rebels.

Then Quirie burst into an open space, a large square-like place with buildings in the far side. I heard Danielle yell something and felt her grab my hand.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" I heard her screaming after Quirie as he raced across the square away from us. She ran with me diagonally across the square just as some men burst into the square close behind us. In a moment we were lost in a maze of small alleys until we slipped into a wide street. Far below, possibly a quarter of a mile away, we saw lights. We went on running until we ran into the arms of four gendarmes patrolling the streets.

Danielle exploded the story of our escape seconds after the gendarmes had escorted us into the nearest charge office of the gen-



"You ladies need a fourth?"

darmerie. Sirens screamed as police and military vehicles raced in the general direction of the square and house from which we had escaped, but we could not tell the authorities where the house was.

We slept at police headquarters the rest of the night. The following morning we were escorted to

Military Department headquarters where we revealed all that had happened. By then they already had the head of the soldier and our notes and I was asked to identify the head as being that of the man who had shared our prison cell.

We were also directed to say nothing of the occurrence until authorised by the Military Department. We were told that this was for reasons of security as any statements made by us might send the whole white population of Oran into a panic.

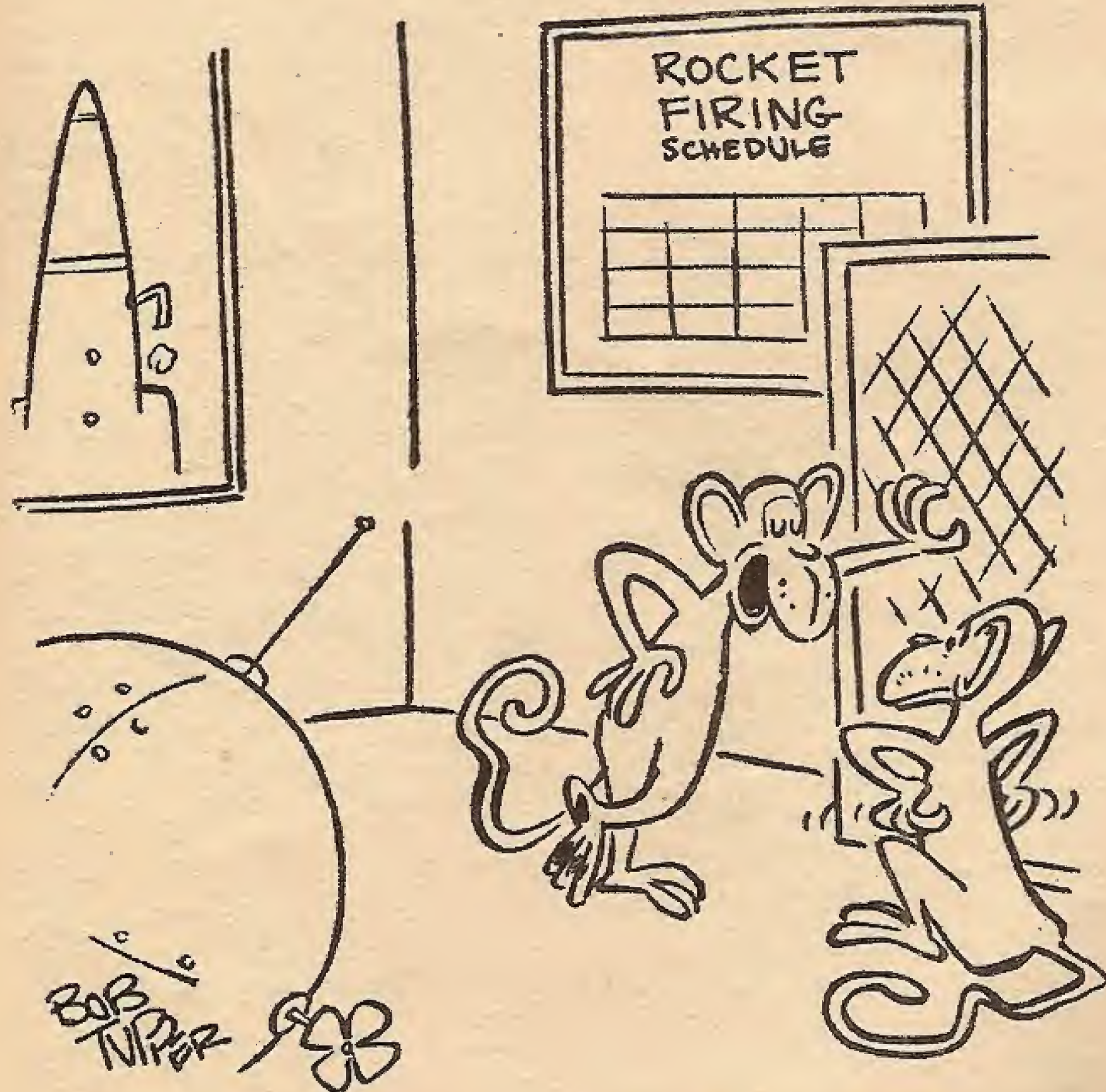
Every house and building in the approximate area of where we were held prisoner was searched by armed forces, but nothing was found, no sign of the house with the dungeon-like basement and no sign of the two Algerians whom we thought we had killed and for seven days no sign of Quirie. Then, one morning, eight days after our escape, a boxed parcel arrived at Military Headquarters and when it was opened by bomb disposal experts, the head of Quirie was found inside.

I received a clearance from the Oran military authorities the same day to leave for France or wherever I wished to go within French jurisdiction.

The girl, Vivienne, who had led me into the trap had disappeared.

I went to see Danielle Filuk just before I left for Tangier, where I work as a croupier in a night club, and suggested that she should leave Oran. "Where shall I go?" she asked as we stood together.

"Why not Tangier?" I asked as I took her hand. "We have a lot of things to talk about and if you work in Tangier I am sure we will find much time to talk about them." When I left for Tangier later in the evening she went with me.



"What do you say to a weekend on the moon, baby?"



"Your wife is on her way in, Sir!"

LET US OUT — THERE'S NO MORE AIR!

(Continued from page 13)

Penetrating the water with his gaze, he noted what seemed to be a submerged tunnel. Was it possible? Yes, he remembered once having read about such things in a course he took at college. How did you reach them—could you get through? It was called trying to "force a syphon", he remembered that, and also remembered reading about how many speleologists were killed attempting to explore them. But if there was a way out of their tomb, he had to find it.

"I'm diving in, Wilson," he yelled up. "Give me more rope." Wilson let the rope slack as Becker pulled it up over his head and dived into icy water. Fortunately, the tunnel wasn't too far from him or he might have blacked out from the freezing water. His brain seemed to go numb. He kept swimming until he was pushing underwater through the narrow tube of rock—

arms stretched out before him.

Nothing. He had swum 50 feet through the underwater tunnel only to come out at the other end. It was a pipe leading to nowhere. Once again there was no way out.

Becker swam back to where Wilson had the rope waiting and began the hazardous climb upwards with the difficulty of clearing the overhang of rock formations.

Their only hope now lay at the cause of the problem—the cave's mouth.

By December 23 the men had cleared away most of the loose rubble near the entrance.

On January 4, 1945, they discovered the bad news. They came up against slabs of solid rock that had fallen across the entrance and sealed it tight. For days they chipped away at the stone barrier, but it was soon apparent that without dynamite the job was futile. They were trapped.

For a few weeks they kept up their spirits by believing that rescue operations would start from the outside. But they heard nothing. Discipline and co-operation vanished. Until then, Ikari and Tanaka had been tolerant of their strenu-

ous labour; now all drew apart, suspicious and afraid. Becker and his two buddies formed one group; the two Japanese another; and the six girls a third.

"February 9. Serious trouble for the first time," wrote Becker in the diary. "Captain Ikari and Sergeant Tanaka forcing their attentions on the girls. Delia Delgado, a cute Mestizo of 15, in tears because Tanaka won't leave her alone. Almost got into fist fight with Tanaka, but Captain Ikari ordered the sergeant into one of the smaller chambers. Both men nasty and only a matter of time before real trouble. Wilson and Cortino want immediate showdown, but I still have hopes that the Japanese will show some sense in time."

Becker did what he could to keep everyone busy. He drew up plans for building a pool by damming up the underground stream. The water was ice cold, but he even worked out a method for heating it. His enthusiasm was infectious. Wilson, Cortino and the girls all pitched in to get the project started.

On February 14 the trouble exploded. Becker, Wilson and Cortino were fitting rocks together to form the sides of the pool when they heard a muffled scream from one of the chambers where the girls had set up their own private dormitory. Becker sprinted across the cavern.

Sergeant Tanaka, drooling spittle, had pinned Delia to the floor and was slobbering kisses on her face and neck. Her blouse was ripped and hung from her waist. Delia was clawing at Tanaka's face. Her nails tore into his thick skin. He drew back his arm and slapped her hard.

Becker pulled the Japanese away and slammed him across the room.

"Baka!" Tanaka bellowed. "Idiot!" He crouched and charged. He was a chunky man with huge shoulders and long muscular arms. His round head rested on a short thick neck. Sweat rolled down his chest. He looked clumsy, but he was agile, fast and powerful.

Becker side-stepped the charge, but Tanaka's shoulder hit him a glancing blow and sent him sprawling. Becker rolled over and jumped to his feet as Tanaka charged again. He feinted, then met the charge squarely by digging his fist into the man's belly. The force of the blow knocked the wind out of Tanaka. He doubled over, gasping for breath. Becker moved in quickly. He forced him against the wall, then shifting his attack from the body to the head he caught Tanaka with a hard left hook and a powerful straight right. The blows smashed Tanaka's nose and blood dripped down his chin.

Becker worked over him with a cold, merciless rage and Tanaka's face turned red and puffy. The soldier tried to ward off the blows, but Becker brushed his arms aside. Tanaka finally fell forward on his face.

Becker picked up a smelly slop pail and dashed the acrid contents over the unconscious sergeant. Tanaka shook his head and breath-

ing noisily crawled to his feet.

"If I catch you in here again," Becker warned, "I'll kill you."

For the first time, Becker realised that they were not alone. Captain Ikari had come in during the fight but had made no attempt to interfere or help his countryman. Wilson, Cortino and the girls were watching him silently.

Captain Ikari pushed Tanaka out of the room. At the entrance Ikari paused. "Perhaps Tanaka San will kill you first, Becker!" Ikari smiled and sauntered off.

For the next three weeks everyone fell into a morbid depression. Wilson and Cortino grew moody and sharp-tempered. The girls remained in their dorm, afraid to go anywhere alone. Tanaka and Ikari holed up in one of the side chambers and deliberately avoided the others.

One day Carmen took Becker aside. "It's impossible to go on living this way," she said. "If you try to keep the men away from us you will surely be killed. We have enough food to last us for years, so we must try to make some kind of normal life in here. The girls have decided that they will pair off with a man."

"Do we pull straws to choose partners?"



"Just a minute Farnsworth, I saw her first!"

Carmen smiled. "We have already chosen," she said. "Please call the men together."

Carmen's announcement that the girls would choose a man to live with brought a spontaneous cheer. Even Ikari and Tanaka seemed pleased. They all shuffled about

waiting for this deadly serious game to go on.

"We girls must be allowed to make the choice," she announced, "and you must promise to respect our decision."

Captain Ikari drew himself up to attention and nodded his head briskly.

"Sacre Dios," Cortino exclaimed. "Don't keep the bridegrooms waiting."

Carmen called the roll. "Maria?"

Maria was part Chinese and Filipino. She was a bright, big-boned girl and spoke Japanese quite well. She stepped out of the group and walked across the room. Lowering her eyes, she put her hand on Captain Ikari's shoulder. He burst out laughing and puffed out his chest proudly.

"Are you satisfied to take Maria?" Carmen asked.

"Hai!" he barked.

Alma, a tiny Moro with big, sad brown eyes, chose to live with Ramon Cortino. Benay, a youngster with a happy giggle, put her hand to her mouth and stifling a nervous laugh, walked to Roy Wilson's side. He took her hand. "Thanks, Benay," he murmured.

And then Carmen dropped her little bomb-shell. "Delia, Margarita and myself," she said quietly, "have decided to live with Becker."

"Aiii!" Tanaka screamed. "What about me?" He let loose a stream of obscenities.

"Nobody wants you, Tanaka," Carmen said evenly.

Tanaka grabbed Ikari by the jacket, demanding that one of the girls be forced to choose him. Ikari brushed the sergeant's hands away. Tanaka's face turned into a mask of rage and hatred. He turned on his heels and, sobbing, fled.

"Carmen!" Becker barked. "Do you know what you've done? He won't accept living alone. You're begging for trouble."

"Si," she agreed, "but I cannot force anyone to live with that kind of scum."

The girls were very thorough. They had assigned the men different chambers. Becker was given

ARMY FUN

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• ADVENTURE
• GOOD PAY
• ...



"With a handsome fellow like you in camp I can see where they'll have to double the guard around the Wac's barracks."



"Aren't you forgetting the salute, Corporal?"

the dorm, which Carmen promptly dubbed "Becker's Paradise". Carmen had discovered a bundle of padded jackets and the girls had fixed up a cosy, if somewhat makeshift bed.

Becker kicked off his shoes and sat on the makeshift bed with his arms folded and his legs crossed.

"Do I look like your chief and master?" he asked.

Delia, the baby of the group, blushed. The 16-year-old Margarita hung her head and giggled.

"Silly!" Carmen laughed. "You look more like a man sitting on top of a volcano."

Still laughing, Carmen darted to the light bulb and twisted it black. He heard the girls shuffling about and whispering. Suddenly he was tumbled on to his back by a squirming pile of females. Having given up hope of rescue, they now lost all their inhibitions. And for the first time since he had been entrapped, Becker did not miss the dawn.

When Becker finally awakened, Delia had her face buried in his shoulder, Margarita was sprawled across his chest. Carmen, having turned on the light, smiled at him. Running her hands over her naked thighs, she began to sway and turn

in an erotic dance that she never learned in the girls' school in Davao.

Time lost all meaning. Becker almost forgot he was imprisoned and might possibly die there in the cave. To him, each minute was indeed Becker's Paradise. The girls waited on him as though he were, in fact, their chief and master.

For a week Becker saw Cortino and Wilson only for brief moments. Soon, however, all of them began to gather together in "Becker's Paradise" for dinner. They sat around swapping tales, dancing and helping to pass the time with their memories of times before the war.

Captain Ikari joined them from time to time, but rarely spoke. Most of the time he was a loner and Maria loyally remained with him. Once she confided in Carmen that Ikari preferred her to remain apart from the other girls.

Sergeant Tanaka ate alone. He sulked about the cave like some wild beast. His beard grew scraggly and his face and hands were covered with an accumulation of dirt. So long as the light was on it didn't matter. But Becker, hoping to preserve their precious supply of petrol and oil, suggested the generator be turned off six hours each day.

In the dark, Tanaka turned their paradise into hell. They couldn't see him, but they could hear his harsh breath and his soft, padded footsteps. The peculiar animal noises he made sent shivers up their backs. And when they couldn't hear him they smelled the acrid sweat of his unclean body. Often they heard him hammering away at a pile of metal junk he'd found in the cave.

Ramon Cortino took it hardest. The slightest noise made him jump. Soon he refused to sleep when the lights were out. Instead, he sat in the darkness with a kitchen knife in his hands. Tanaka sensed Cortino's fear and took special delight in tormenting the Filipino.

"He is crazy!" shouted Cortino to Becker. "Madre! Let us put this man out of his misery before he kills us all."

Becker tried to reason with Cortino, but nothing he said could bring the frightened Filipino to forget the Japanese sergeant.

"And what's he banging on that junk for?" Cortino demanded. "What is he up to?"

On July 25, 1945, Becker made the following entry in his diary.

"A strange, oversweet odor filled the cave this morning. We rushed in to investigate and found Sergeant Tanaka reeling around in a stupor and singing a Japanese song at the top of his voice. What a joke! All these weeks Tanaka was building a still. We found it hidden behind a pile of empty cartons in his room—yards of copper coils and a mash made from rice and sugar. Tanaka couldn't wait for the whisky to distill and drank the stuff raw. Poor guy! Without a woman he has finally found his way to escape."

Cortino wasn't amused. He overturned the mash and smelled the still. "Thief!" Cortino screamed. "Steal our sugar, eh? You think we have sugar for this poison?"

Tanaka flopped on to the floor and wept. Suddenly he jumped to his feet. A look of insane hatred crossed his face, only to be replaced by a crazy, lop-sided smile. He pointed his finger at Cortino and then ran his finger across his throat.

"Hai!" he grunted. "For you."

Cortino went berserk and slashed into the Japanese with both fists. Becker and Wilson pried him loose and as they dragged the Filipino away, Tanaka laughed—a demented cackling laugh.

Becker appealed to Captain Ikari. "Talk to the guy. He'll listen to you. Do something or sure in hell there's going to be trouble."

Ikari snorted. "Trouble for you. No trouble for Captain Ikari!"

"A strange tension is building up in this stone prison," Becker wrote in his diary on September 13. "Since Cortino destroyed Tanaka's still, the sergeant has stayed out of our way completely. It was bad enough while he was prowling around and mumbling nonsense. Now it is worse. We don't see or hear him. He moves around in the darkness like a cat. Everyone feels he is spying on them. Cortino is after me every minute to kill the guy, but I still



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refuse. He's a human being—mad, filthy, brutal, but still human. I can't appoint myself judge, jury and executioner. Until last week Wilson supported me. Now even Wilson and the girls are beginning to side with Cortino. I don't know where it will end."

Cortino was like a man possessed—constantly vigilant and almost afraid to sleep. He lost weight rapidly. He jumped at the slightest sound. He was either screaming at Alma or hugging her in tears. He developed a nervous tick that twitched the side of his face and he was constantly on the edge of exhaustion.

Sergeant Tanaka, using animal shrewdness, seemed to be playing with Cortino. On the night of October 2, Cortino dropped into an exhausted sleep, unable to keep up his hopeless vigil. On that night Tanaka struck. When Becker went into Cortino's room the next morning, to get him to join in the building of the pool, he stopped in horrified shock. Cortino and Alma were sprawled in each others arms, but their faces were gone—smashed

into a horrible pulp by some blunt club.

In the dorm Becker told Wilson that Tanaka had to die. It would be an execution of necessity. And it would be a legal retaliation. In this tiny society of theirs, Tanaka was a threat to the life that was still allotted to them. There was only one punishment for a murderer—death. The girls agreed, and when Captain Ikari was informed of their verdict he merely shrugged as though the matter were no concern of his.

"You girls stay here in the dorm together," Becker said.

He and Wilson found two heavy crowbars and began their search. They covered every inch of the cave, but Tanaka could not be found. They retraced their steps. They set up blocks in the passageways, but Tanaka was gone.

"Okay," said Becker. "The guy didn't go up in smoke. We'll post a 24-hour guard over the food supply. When he's hungry enough he'll come crawling out of his crack."

They kept the lights on at all

times. Becker and Wilson took turns at guard around the clock. A week passed without any sign of Tanaka. The girls were close to hysteria. They wept and huddled in their dorm together. Little things set them off and they began to quarrel bitterly.

"Must you brush your hair all day long and all night, too?" Benay screamed at Wilson, who had a habit of running his fingers through his thinning, sandy hair. "Stroking your hair won't make it grow."

Wilson flushed and jammed his fists into his pockets. Carmen, Delia and Margarita worked on each others' nerves, too. Where before they had been co-operative and helpful to each other, now they were torn by jealousies. Each girl was resentful of any attention that Becker gave to one or the other of them.

Captain Ikari did nothing to soothe their nerves. He and Maria moved about the cave freely. He treated her with great concern and plied her with attention and consideration. She bloomed, and they laughed together a great deal.

"It's them," Carmen whispered to Becker. "They're hiding Tanaka."

"I searched their room," said Becker.

"Well, search it again," Carmen screamed.

Silently, Becker marched into Ikari's chamber. He searched the passageways that led into the main vaulted chamber, but Tanaka wasn't there. Nor was there the tell-tale odour of his body.

"Sonna ni ira-ira shinai de kudasai," Ikari said with a sarcastic grin.

Becker frowned. Maria giggled and translated. "The Captain says for you not to be so nervous."

Becker stiffened. And he couldn't resist getting back at them in some way. It was a petty, spiteful trick, but he blurted out: "Not for myself, Maria dear, but Carmen thinks Tanaka might take it into his head to take you for his woman."

The girl paled. She hadn't dreamed of that possibility. The seed took root firmly and Maria began to fret and nag at Ikari. For a time the Captain was content to insult and demean the girl, but his patience wore thin and soon he was slapping her around.

"Please," Carmen begged Becker, "don't let that dirty dog beat up Maria."

"She chose him. It's their affair," he said sharply, driving another wedge between them.

Once Maria rushed into their dorm and begged them to let her stay with them. Her face was swollen and her eyes red from weeping.

Captain Ikari stomped in after her and shouted, "She's my woman! Don't get in my way."

He dug his fingers in her hair and dragged her back to their quarters. Becker heard him beat her unmercifully. Carmen begged him again to stop Ikari, but Becker refused.

"She dug her own grave. Let her lie in it," he said with a cruelty that sounded shocking even to his own ears.

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The girls kept after him, until he finally said, "If we do this thing we'll turn him into another Tanaka and we'll have two wild beasts on our hands."

"Then warn him to stop beating her!" Carmen demanded.

"Okay."

Becker delivered the ultimatum, and to his surprise Ikari accepted the warning calmly. He appeared almost servile.

On the eighteenth day after the murder of Cortino and Alma, the lights suddenly went out throughout the cavern. Becker's throat tightened. His heart pounded wildly. After so many days of constant light they had almost forgotten the meaning of total blackness. It enveloped them with fear. The darkness was stifling. Then they heard Tanaka's wild laughter echo through the cave. Somewhere in the darkness the madman was lying in wait for them.

"He's stopped the generator," said Wilson. "He's waiting for us to come out there."

Carmen threw her arms around Becker. "Don't go," she begged. "Let Ikari turn on the generator."

Wilson jumped to his feet. "I'll go. I've got to do something or else I'll b—— well go mad myself."

Without waiting for an answer he ploughed toward the generator, stumbling in the darkness. He moved farther and soon all was silent. Suddenly a terrible scream pierced the air. Becker ran toward the cry, stumbling against the walls and over the rough projections in the floor. Moving past the main vaulted chamber, he groped his way into the generator room. He heard the men scuffling and their heavy breathing.

Becker slipped past the struggling figures. In the darkness he groped toward the generator and found it at last. He snapped on the switches, but the generator didn't go on. He moved his hand along the edge of the machine and then discovered the cable had been disconnected. His hand shook as he turned it into the socket. He pushed the starter button. The motor revved into action and slowly the lights went on.

With an inhuman roar, Tanaka picked up Wilson and hurled him against the jagged stone wall. The dull thud echoed through the chamber. Wilson flopped to the ground and lay still.

Tanaka bent to one knee and picked up a crowbar. He moved in on Becker and then with a grunt swung the hooked end at Becker's head. Becker ducked and heard the iron hook whistle past his ear. Becker shuffled back out of range.

Carmen suddenly ran up behind him and thrust a kitchen knife into his hand. Becker gripped it and began to circle the big Japanese. Tanaka closed again, slashing out with the crowbar. Becker didn't move fast enough and the hook tore open a jagged wound across his chest.

Becker circled and retreated and Tanaka grew angrier and bolder.

Becker moved like a boxer, then suddenly feinting toward Tanaka he drew a hard blow. The iron bar caught him across the arm and burned like a blow torch. But before Tanaka could recover his balance and bring the bar back for another blow, Becker lunged forward and sank the knife to the hilt in the Japanese sergeant's chest.

Surprise crossed Tanaka's face. He clutched the blade and tried to pull it loose, but his fingers had lost their strength. The madness passed from his eyes. He looked almost grateful. With a weary sigh he fell forward.

Becker picked up Wilson, but the Aussie was dead. His right ear had been torn off in the fight and a terrible hole had been dug into his belly by the crowbar. Despite these blows, Wilson had fought on doggedly.

When Becker was finally able to compose himself, he went into Captain Ikari's chamber and asked the Japanese to help him bury the dead.

Ikari nodded. Together they carried the bodies toward the tunnel

entrance and buried them under the rubble next to the crude graves of Cortoni and Alma.

Weeks later, Becker discovered Tanaka's hiding place. At the end of one tunnel he had removed a large boulder. Beyond the boulder was a small cave about four feet square. A pile of cans and filth were heaped inside. Tanaka had been building up supplies even before he killed Cortino and Alma.

The girls did their best to make Becker forget the horrible memory of the fight and Wilson's death. Benay joined the others in "Becker's Paradise" and the girls went out of their way to be pleasant to her. Even Captain Ikari began acting decently and treated Maria with respect. Becker accepted the change in the Japanese, but deep down he knew that Ikari would never forgive him for taking over unofficial command.

Becker took up the work on the pool and on December 12, 1945, one year after they were trapped in the cave, the pool was finished. Becker had devised a heating system that kept the water at an even tempera-

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ture of 72 degrees. The girls loved it.

On that day Becker made the following entry in his diary. "The pool is a godsend. I think it has washed away the blood of the man I killed. The girls spend hours frolicking in the water. They have never been more delightful. They remind me of seals."

During the weeks Becker had worked alone on the pool, the girls also had been busy. They had rebuilt Tanaka's still.

"For whatever time we have," said Carmen, "let's squeeze every pleasure from life that we can."

Becker roared happily. "Why in hell not!"

Distilled rice wine added a new dimension to their lives. Carmen invented childish games to amuse Becker. Once she switched off the lights and made him identify his wives by touching only their noses. Another time he had to guess their identity by kissing their toes. And so it went.

On January 16, 1946, Becker made this entry in his diary:

"Captain Ikari has begun to mistreat Maria again. The girls beg me to put a stop to it. I can't stand her screams, but then if I interfere I know I'll have to kill Ikari. He's not the kind of man to act on impulse. This beating up of Maria is calculated. He wants me to threaten him, I believe. But why?"

Becker waited two weeks and learned the answer. A terrible explosion shattered the stillness. Becker raced into Ikari's room and found himself looking into the barrel of a .45 automatic.

"Are you surprised to see the gun?" Ikari gloated. Ikari pointed the muzzle toward the wall and aimed it at a small target he had drawn. The target had one jagged

hole through the bull's eye. Ikari squeezed the trigger and the gun went off with a roar. When the smoke cleared, Becker turned and saw that another jagged hole was torn in the bull's eye.

"The third shot is for you, Mister Becker."

Becker had often wondered what he might do in this kind of situation. Would he beg for his life? Now he knew. If Ikari wanted to kill him in cold blood, Becker wouldn't bow his head to plead for mercy. He waited for Ikari's move.

For the first time since they'd been buried alive Captain Ikari held the upper hand and savored the situation. He gloated and boasted.

"You broke the guns and I, Captain Ikari, put the shattered bits together. We Nipponese know how to make the best of any situation. How to create."

The girls came into the room and flung themselves in front of Ikari, weeping. He kicked them out of the way.

With a triumphant smile, Ikari raised the gun, and pointing it between Becker's eyes, pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked. There was no explosion. Ikari pulled the trigger again and again and then with an oath, flung it at Becker. The first two shots had jarred loose the home-made firing pin. Off-centre, it wasn't hitting the cartridge properly.

Becker pulled back his big fist and then midway in air he stopped. "So, you're the new Japanese super-man!"

Becker threw back his head and laughed. Soon the girls joined in and they kept laughing until tears streamed from their eyes.

"I'm not going to kill you, Ikari," Becker said finally. "You can wan-

der about the cave like your friend Tanaka and contemplate the glories of the Emperor. Maria, leave him alone."

Two days later Ikari drove a sharpened file into his belly and died alone.

Becker still continued to explore and comb every inch of the cave. He kept discovering new wonders inside their tomb. He found a lava bed and coral formations. At one point he witnessed a phenomenon—in one of the tunnels was a large hole and gusts of air were sucked up into it. At first Becker thought the hole could provide a possible means of escape, but after many attempts at hammering and chiseling it he knew once more that escape was impossible. The air being sucked up simply died away.

Becker stopped making entries in his diary. Then on March 30, 1946, 481 days after they were buried by the landslide, Becker heard a dull hammering at the mouth of the cave. He thought it was his imagination, but the noise continued. Three days later an opening was dynamited from the outside. The girls crawled out and Becker took a last look at the cavern before following.

The Filipino workers stared incredulously as the girls and Becker emerged from the sealed vault.

The war was over and the Filipinos, facing a shortage of food, had broken into the cave for the Japanese supplies.

The bodies of those who had died in the cave were hauled out and buried.

Becker and the girls refused to talk about their experiences and soon the story was forgotten. Becker returned to the States and six months ago was persuaded to open his diary for this publication. ●

SILENT TIGER

(Continued from page 35)

All at once I wanted to see it over . . . and I thought it was when Gant went down.

But his fingers clawed into the sedge grass, and he rose to his feet. He fell into a clinch, gripping Grenfell's arms, holding on till his head cleared.

Grenfell tried to throw him off, but Gant still clung, shaking drops of blood from his lacerated face down Grenfell's chest.

My breathing was better now, although my insides still hurt. I leaned against the jetty post.

Gant butted his head under Grenfell's chin, and let the ex-pug go. The head butt split Grenfell's chin and threw his backward. Gant, now somewhat recovered, tagged him with left and right, heavy punches that showed Gant still had some sting.

Grenfell ducked under another one and came into Gant, switching his attack to Gant's body. His left buried itself almost to the wrist in Gant's midriff with a sullen, sodden thump, and his right came up in a short one under Gant's heart.

This was the savage, punishing "Fisty" Magee now: the man who'd climbed into the ranks of Australia's top-flight heavies in '57 and '58—the man who'd half-killed young Hanlon that night in Rushcutters Bay.

Gant paled under Grenfell's punishment and reeled away, but didn't go down. Grenfell followed him, driving into solar plexus and ribs. Gant was still on his feet . . . and I knew then with a clear certainty that Grenfell was not trying to knock him out.

I moved across to Gant's offside, grabbing the arm of the man nearest to me.

"Stop him!" I said in a high voice. "Can't you see? He's fightin' to kill!"

They stood there, as if all this couldn't happen to Joe Gant, the best man on the coast.

I moved forward quickly and the pain in my belly came again and doubled me up. By an effort of will, I reached Grenfell and arm-barred him across the throat from behind.

He was hard to hold . . . and I put on the pressure. He gagged, choked . . . tried to turn even on me.

And then the other two came across at last, pinning Grenfell's

arms to his sides. Then he stopped struggling . . . and was still. All at once he seemed to come back from a dream world.

Gant fell at his feet. Grenfell frowned and peered down at him.

There was an eerie hush, and when Grenfell spoke it seemed as loud as a clash of cymbals.

"Now you know, Jim," he said. "Now you know the story of 'Fisty' Magee, an' his sudden retirement from the ring. Don't ask me to explain it."

He was himself again now, and he bent over the heavily breathing form of Joe Gant, lying there at his feet.

"He's beginnin' to come round. He'll be okay now. Thanks for stoppin' me."

He stood up again—and then Vennie Tremayne was there in front of him. Wordlessly, she reached up and pulled his face down to hers and avidly sought his mouth, still bleeding from Gant's fists.

Her lips dovetailed deep . . .

Grenfell looked at her, without speaking. The back of his hand wiped the kiss from his mouth and flashed across the startled girl's cheek. He turned and walked quickly away across the salt flats.

All at once he looked terribly alone. ●

THE COMEBACK

(Continued from page 4)

"Yes. Fay was born there. I moved to the mainland after her mother died . . . more than 20 years ago now. Fay doesn't remember her mother."

I didn't push it. I swung the questions back to Lambert then, but I was watching Larsen. He had his eye on me. I saw his lips move soundlessly around my name and suddenly his body was stiff, face bloodless, the scar livid on his neck.

"Dad, what's wrong? You look ill!"

"I'm — okay, girlie. "He was standing now. "Excuse me, Mr. Marlowe. I have an ulcer that gives me gyp occasionally . . . I've got a mixture in the kitchen . . ."

"I'll get it, dad . . ."

"No, you sit down, Fay. I'll get it myself."

"It's all settled about tomorrow then, Mr. Larsen? I mean my going on the trawler with you . . .?"

"Well, I don't know. I wouldn't like to be held responsible if anything happened to you."

"You won't be, I can guarantee that."

"I thought you'd already agreed to take Mr. Marlowe along, dad?"

"Well, I've been thinking since then, girlie, and . . ."

"Heck, Vern," Lambert put in quietly. "The publicity'll do us good."

"And Mr. Marlowe says his paper will pay, dad," Fay smiled.

Larsen sighed. "All right. Be at the wharf at 5 am sharp. If you're not there we don't wait. I've got to catch the tide."

"I'll be there," I promised as he left the room. I turned back to Lambert. "I heard you'd dislocated your knee in the capsize."

"That's right, I did."

"I don't see any sign of a limp."

"No, Vern clicked it back into place. Marvellous with his hands, that man. The whole fleet comes to him with their cuts and bruises and breaks. Vern fixes them all."

"The folks about here say he's as good as a doctor," Fay told me proudly. "But he's modest about his healing touch. Doesn't like anyone to mention it. So, please, don't include it in your article, Mr. Marlowe."

I forced a grin that felt pretty tight around the edges. I was beginning to shake a little now. I had the scoop of the year almost within my grasp.

Almost . . .

I was surprised to find Lambert on the trawler with Larsen and Fay when I walked out to the wharf at 5 am sharp. He grinned as he helped me aboard and Fay smiled hello. Larsen nodded curtly.

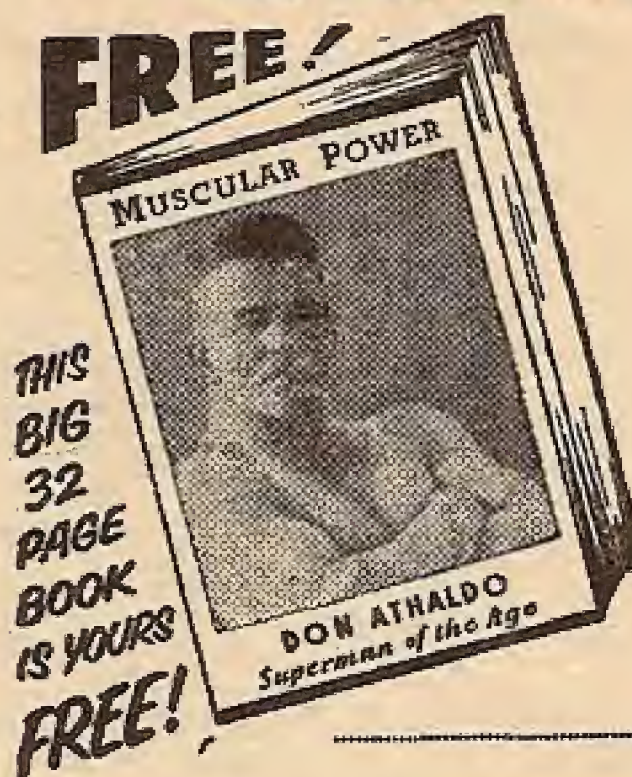
I felt as tight as a clockspring. I'd been up most of the night at the 'phone, checking details of the Ericson case with the paper's file clerks. I needed a drink now to set me up but I knew one would be too many, 100 not enough.

"I thought you'd be supervising the repairs on your own trawler,

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Lambert?"

"It'll take a fortnight," he said, eyes somehow bright with excitement. Fay was excited, too, over something. She couldn't hold it in any longer. She smiled at me and said, proudly.

"Jim does competitive swimming in his spare time. He's won a lot of trophies. Now he's been chosen for the State team to compete in the Australian championships in Sydney next week. He only found out last night. He'll have to fly down tomorrow night so he's coming out on the trawler today to have as much time with me as possible."

"Nice going, young fella."

"If we win, I stand a chance of making the next Empire Games," he said enthusiastically.

Larsen kicked the motor into life and we moved slowly out into the river. I sat out of the way on a pile of nets, watching Fay and Lambert move about the decks. We crawled across the estuary, past the black cliffs, running for the white line of thunder that marked the bar. I watched Larsen's hands on the wheel.

Was it possible that those thick, line-scarred fingers had once held a surgeon's scalpel — or a blazing pistol? I had my first twinges of doubt as I watched him deftly manipulate the wheel and the throttle. He did it so effortlessly that it was hard to imagine that this man had been born to any other life than that of a trawlerman . . . We scraped over the bar with a bit of a bump. That was all.

"No sensations going out, anyway," I said to Fay.

"Going out's always the easiest — It's the return that's tricky, with the waves breaking astern."

It was noon before we reached the trawling grounds. Most of the time, Larsen and I had been alone in the cockpit. We'd hardly spoken a dozen words. But if I made him uneasy, he didn't show it . . .

Fay and Lambert began working the nets up to the rollers. Larsen moved around me as if I wasn't there.

"You wouldn't know Perth these days, Doc," I said quietly.

He turned cold eyes onto me, not saying anything. "I was there last year. They've turned that beach house at Cottesloe into flats now."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Marlowe," he said very slowly, very distinctly. "I've never been to Perth in my life."

I laughed. "Of course not. You were never a doctor, either."

"Are you crazy, Marlowe?" But he was careful to keep his voice down so it wouldn't reach Fay or Lambert. "I'm a fisherman — Maybe I'm too damn' simple or too damn' dumb to understand you."

Lambert yelled for the boom; Fay called for more speed. Larsen worked the levers automatically.

"Trawl!" Lambert yelled suddenly and Larsen cut in the screw. We moved slowly through the swell, jerking a little with the drag of the nets.

I suddenly wanted to hurt this man who had killed my father. I hadn't started out with any thoughts of revenge but if I could give Larsen a little hell, then why not? It might make him slip up and give me proof that he was really Ericson.

"Maybe Fay or Lambert will understand me better."

"I don't know what you're up to, Marlowe, but I don't like your tone. If you're accusing me of something, spit it out. Or shut up!"

"I did some checking last night. Stuart Ericson's daughter was named Fay. They both disappeared a couple of months before you showed up here. Coincidence, eh, doc?"

"You're a sick man, Marlowe," he said, calmly enough, though his mouth was pulled a little tight. "Sick or crazy, or both."

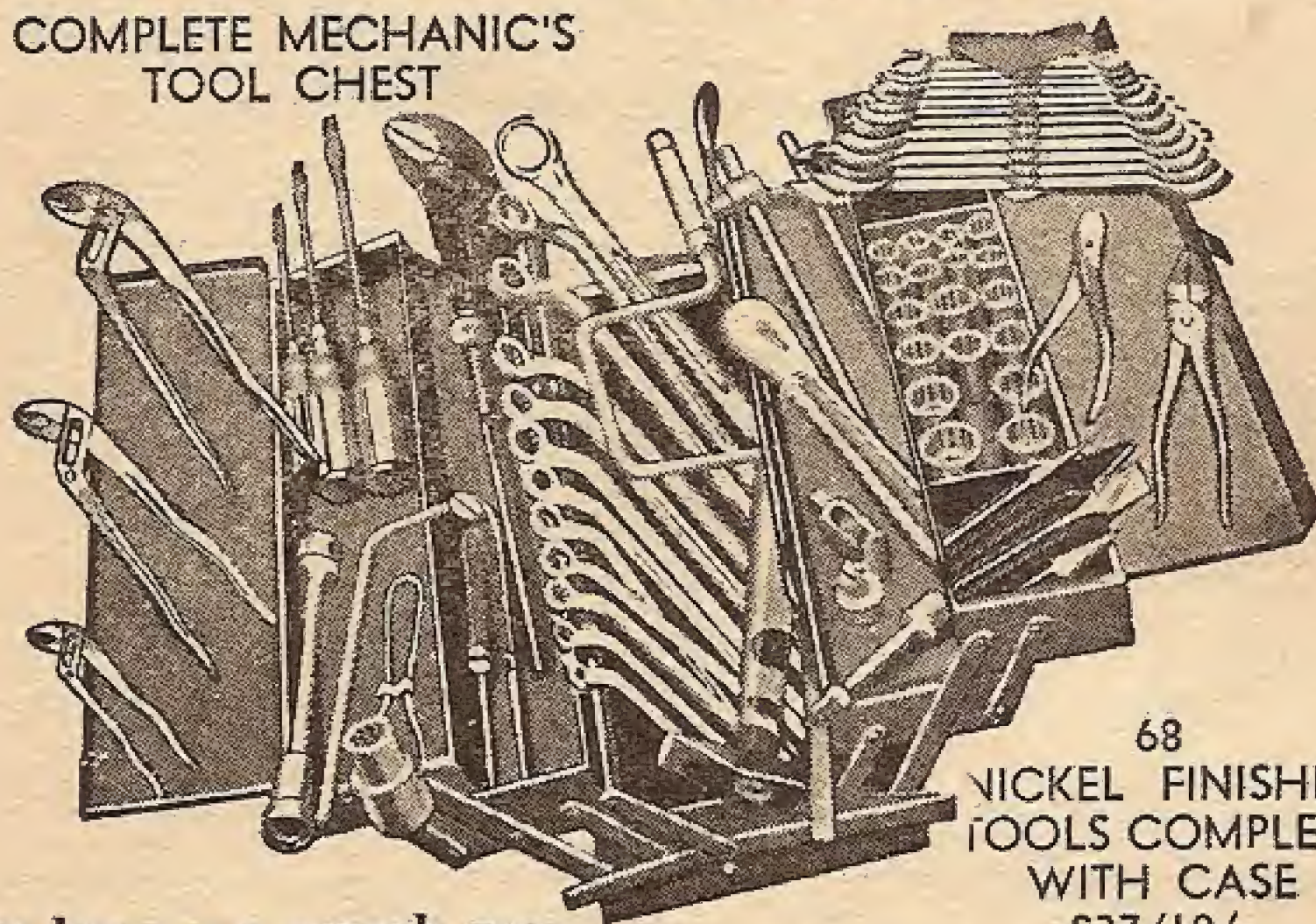
"Aah, come off it, Ericson! Admit it! I've got you dead to rights! Your name isn't Vern Larsen. It's . . ."

"Let go my arm, Marlowe!"

I hit him. I was all worked up and his attitude grated on my raw nerves. The wheel spun as he fell back. Fay screamed. Lambert leapt down into the cockpit. Larsen push-

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P9

ed to his feet, blood at his mouth, his razor-sharp fishing-knife in his hand.

"Grab Marlowe, Jim! He's mad!"

I lunged for his throat. Lambert belted me in the head. I reeled into a corner and they crowded me back, Larsen with the knife held threateningly, though he made no attempt to use it on me. I kicked at Lambert's knee and he fell against Larsen. I jumped forward, fists flailing . . .

A moment later Lambert screamed and fell back, hand clawing at the gaping wound above the elbow of his right arm, blood jetting in a thick, bright stream. The fingers of his right hand were hooked like steel talons. Blood was spurting all round the cockpit and I knew an artery had been severed. Lambert was on his knees, face grey, moaning. Fay ran to him. Larsen stared dumbly at the reddened blade he held. I shouldered him aside, pushed Fay out of the way and jammed my thumb on the pressure-point high in Lambert's armpit. He passed out, falling against me.

"Get a tourniquet around his upper arm, quick!" I snapped at Fay. "Use my belt!"

As she worked with trembling fingers she breathed, "Oh, my God! What — what are we going to do?"

"Whatever it is we better do it damn' quick!" Then I suddenly realised I had the means of proving my suspicions correct once and for all. "Larsen! Snap out of it, man! I've had to do enough research for medical articles in my day to know you've severed the brachial artery in Lambert's arm. If it isn't repaired almost immediately he can bleed to death . . . a tourniquet's not enough. The artery's got to be stitched!"

Larsen seemed to come out of it then. He gave me a murderous look that still had a lot of sadness in it as he knelt beside us. His hand shook as he looked at the wound. I saw sweat bead his brow.

"I—I can't do anything. This needs a surgeon . . ."

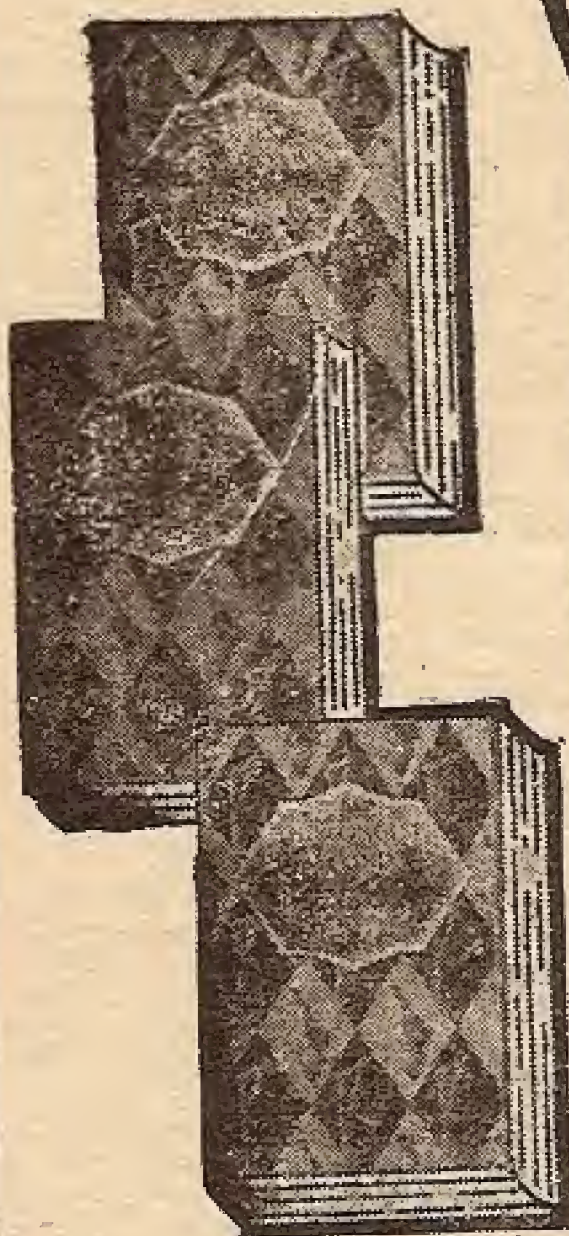
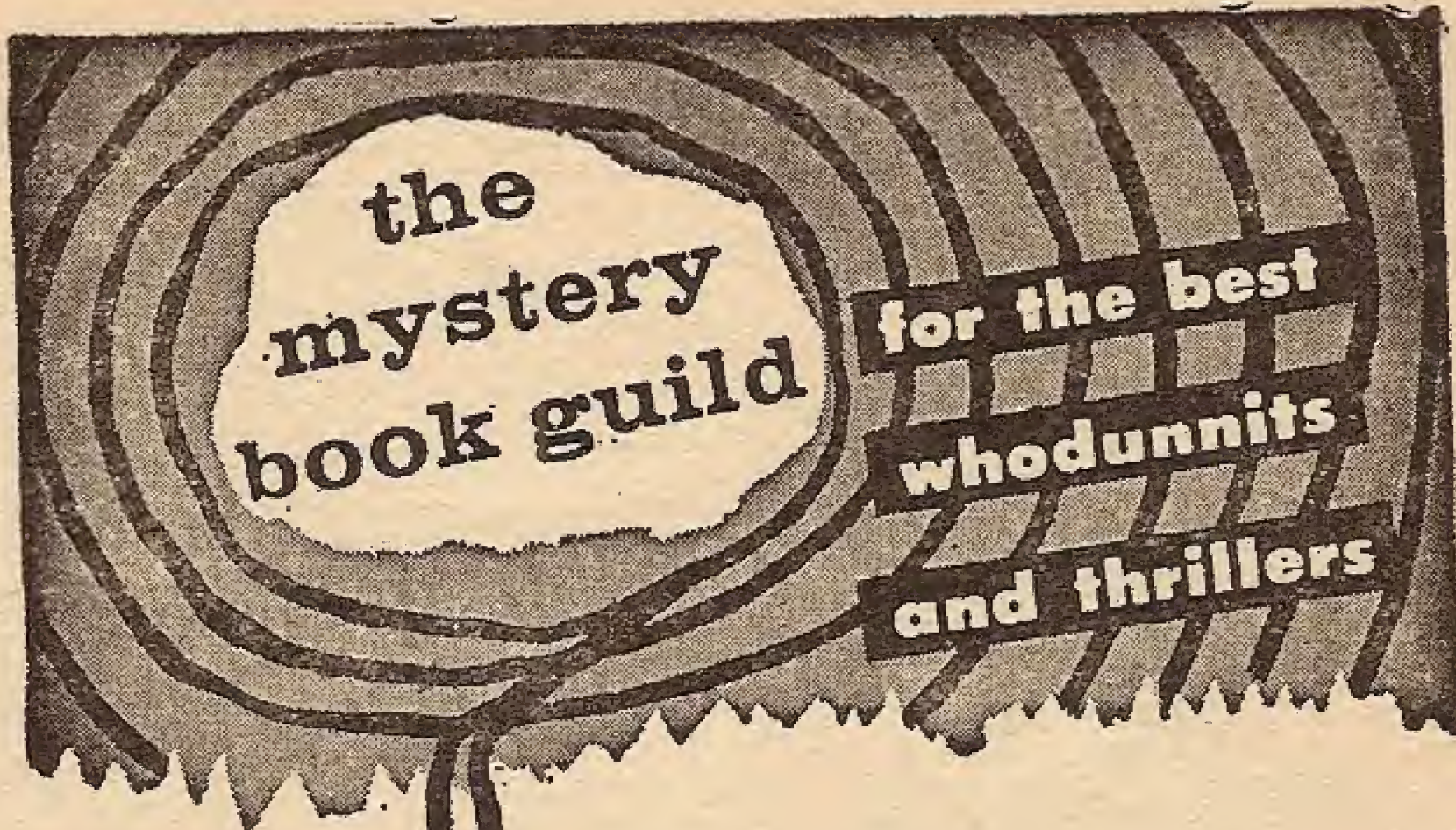
"Come on, Larsen, you don't have much time to decide! Even if he doesn't bleed to death before we get him ashore, he'll be finished as a swimmer unless that arm's repaired . . ."

"Oh, no!" Fay whispered in horror. "Dad, dad, can you do anything? You're good at First Aid. Please, dad, try! For God's sake try!"

Larsen looked sick. His lower lip was trembling. He stared down at his shaking, bloodstained hands.

"Look at the way his hand's clawed!" I snarled, sweating, tensed stomach knotted, wanting to scream at him. "I remember reading something about that . . ."

"It means the ulnar nerve is damaged," Larsen said hoarsely in a weary voice and I knew I had him then. "It's a characteristic paralysis, the terminal joints of the phalanges flexed like that, making the hand into a stiff claw . . . There's nothing I can do about that out here. He'll have to go to hospital. But I'll see about the artery . . ."



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I didn't feel any elation right then. There was too much to do as Larsen began snapping orders to the puzzled, frightened girl and me. The rest is just a blur. I remember lots of hot water, steam rising, the swell rocking the trawler and Larsen swearing obscenely, fingers slippery with blood as he used a hair-thin nylon fishing line and a sewing needle to mate up the severed artery ends. A couple of times he sat back and said he couldn't go on. But he continued until the lips of the wound had been

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sewn together, and bandaged tightly. Then he splinted the stiffened hand and sat back with a sigh, face almost as bloodless as the unconscious Lambert's.

Hours had passed, it seemed. The sun was falling into the sea in the west. Now that it was all over, Fay had a reaction and fainted. We put her in the bunk above the one that held Lambert. On deck again, Larsen cut his nets, gunned the motor and headed back for the mainland at full throttle.

"Nice work, Doctor Ericson," I said quietly, lighting two cigarettes and giving him one.

After a long time he said, "Why do you fellows have to rake over the muck in a man's past, Marlowe? Why can't you leave people alone? Fay knows nothing about the Perth affair. She doesn't remember any other life than the one I've built here. And it's a good life! She's happy here and she'll marry Jim Lambert with my blessing. Or she would have. God alone knows what'll happen when you print that story about the notorious Doctor Ericson, finally located after 20 years, posing as a fisherman . . . What is it you want, Marlowe? Revenge? I've paid many times over for what I did! A man can make his own hell if he listens to his conscience . . ."

"No, I didn't start out for revenge, Larsen. I needed a big story, a scoop, to make a comeback. I had a little trouble and developed a taste for booze. It just about finished me as a journalist. But when I break this story about you, I'll be right back at the top. It's kind of fitting that my father's murderer should help me get there."

We were cutting through the water fast, the bow-wave creaming and hissing. Larsen went below to look at Lambert and see how Fay was. When he came out on deck again he lit the riding lights. It was dark now and the glow of the mainland was only a few miles off.

"Lambert's all right. I had another look at his hand. The nerve doesn't appear to be damaged beyond repair. Fay's drifted into an exhausted sleep. So that leaves just you and me, Marlowe."

I tensed, watching him warily.

"You could disappear over the side and no one would know the difference. We've got rum and brandy aboard, I could say you took a drink to steady your nerves after we'd fixed Lambert's arm. It was enough to set you off. You kept hitting it, stumbled overside in the dark. You'd gone by the time I got the boat turned around."

I pressed back, ready to jump him if he came at me.

"It wouldn't make any difference, of course," he went on. "I'm afraid I made too professional a job of Jim's arm, even if I did have to improvise. It will start all kinds of questions. You can't learn those things from a book: you have to sweat out years in an operating theatre. There's no way I could explain it satisfactorily without admitting I was a surgeon years ago . . . Wonderful how knowledge a man thinks he's forgotten returns in a flash in an emergency . . ."

So, you see, Marlowe, whether or not that story gets printed, the story will come out. I don't care for my own sake. I'm thinking of Fay. She'll go through hell when that story breaks."

"Just as long as the story gets me where I want to go! I don't care who gets hurt in the process, Larsen! I've got my scoop."

"But we're still aboard the trawler and we've got to cross the bar yet," he reminded me, smiling bleakly. "While I was below, I put Fay and Jim into the only two life jackets aboard. They'll float all right when we capsize and the currents'll carry them up onto the beach — you and I won't need life jackets, Marlowe. We're not going to float."

I stiffened at the crazy look on his face.

"No, Marlowe, I've thought it out. Without you, there's no story. Without me, there can be no explanation about how I knew how to sew up a severed artery. With the two of us gone, drowned in another bar accident, Fay and Jim will have all the chance they need. They won't drown. I'll see they're well clear of the boat before I ram the bar."

"You're mad!" I yelled but mad or not, I knew he'd do it just so he could finish me, protect Fay from a scandal. I felt the hackles lift on my neck.

"We're coming to the bar now," he said matter-of-factly and let go the wheel. The trawler yawed dangerously. Quite calmly, he walked towards the companionway leading below. "You can have a go at taking her across if you like. You won't make it . . . I've got to get Fay and Jim over the side . . ."

"Larsen, for goodness sake!" I bawled, lunging for the wheel, seeing the white foam of the bar looming through the darkness. I felt the boat plunging, yawing. I couldn't control her. He started below and I yelled again. "Larsen! You can't do this, man! You'll kill us all!"

He smiled tiredly. "Just you and me, Marlowe."

The boat began to broach, I fought it back to an even keel but couldn't control it. I was drenched in sweat and spray.

"Look! — I won't print the story! I won't even write it up! I'll forget I ever heard of you . . ."

"You say that now, but how about when you're back on dry land, eh? Besides, I told you whether you print it or not, the story'll still come out . . . I can't waste any more time talking. I've got to get Fay and Jim over the side . . ."

"Hell! We're almost on the bar!"

Larsen's face was strained as he glanced ahead. He whipped around to face me, speaking fast.

"You swear you'll never write up that story or tell it to anyone? You give me your word, Marlowe?"

"Hell, yes, yes! Come and take this wheel before we go over!"

He shoved me aside, grabbed the wheel as we began to lift.

It was anti-climax after that. He took the boat in expertly and when we reached the wharf Fay came

up from below, but she wasn't wearing a lifejacket. She went to a phone box and called an ambulance and 10 minutes later she rode away in it, holding Lambert's hand. He didn't have a lifejacket on, either.

"You bluffed me!" I accused Larsen angrily. "You never intended throwing them overside or wrecking us! I should have known you'd never risk Fay drowning . . ."

"Going back on your word, Marlowe?" he asked tautly.

I glared at him a long time, slowly shook my head. "No — I'll stick to it, but you're finished, anyway. I'll be satisfied to see that. As you said yourself, that arm of Lambert's will start enough questions to bring out everything . . ."

"I don't think so — after 20 years, a man's skill must diminish. I did a pretty clumsy job on that artery, not intentionally, of course, I just couldn't help it.

I stared at him incredulously. He was quite calm and confident. He'd pulled a bluff to end all bluffs and damned if it hadn't worked, with me as the mug! He lit a cigarette and walked down the wharf towards the policeman who'd been called. There would be lots of questions to answer, but Larsen wasn't scared of the law — or me.

As I followed slowly, he said, "It was an accident. Jim tripped over the nets with his knife in his hand . . . Okay, Marlowe?"

What else could I say? "Sure, Larsen, an accident. And you did a rough but efficient job."

"I'll explain if you want to go and write up the story . . . You've just taken part in a first-class drama, Marlowe, I don't think you realise that. A serious accident at sea, a man who'll bleed to death unless rough surgery is used on him immediately, his whole future as an athlete in the balance. The race against time to get ashore, crossing the treacherous bar — Quite a few dramatic ingredients there. Written up properly, it should make first-class reading . . ."

Suddenly I realised I had my scoop after all . . .

I wrote it up and it made page one. Not headlines, but the front page anyway. It didn't put me back at the top but it boosted me quite a few rungs up the ladder. Hammerstein's already promised me an office of my own.

Fay and Lambert are married now and after a few more months of rehabilitating physiotherapy, he will be swimming again. I don't know what story Larsen told them about the cause of the fight, but they never mention it now.

Larsen still fishes for a living and likes to make out he's still smarting from the lash of a pompous hospital surgeon who told him he was lucky he hadn't crippled Lambert's arm for keeps, sewing him up the way he did! But when we're having a quiet beer together we both laugh about it. Oh, yes, I can have a beer now, any time. I can take the drink or leave it alone.

I've made my comeback. And although I'm not yet at the top where I'd been aiming, I've come back from a long, long way away. •

APPOINTMENT IN TANGIER

(Continued from page 25)

"Ahh, Mr. Regan," he said finally. "I am relieved to see you are still alive. I thought —"

"Don't hand me that. Lay off the soft soap. This isn't a social call. I'm here on business. I have some things I want to sell to you."

"Things? A canister and something else?"

"Your life. I'm offering you a package deal, both at a bargain price."

"Surely the shoe is on the other foot, Mr. Regan. I have but to summon Amedeo, and —"

"Amedeo is very tired. He won't wake up for a while."

There was a short silence as Botticelli considered this. Then he said, "And what price?"

"Fifteen thousand. Although your life isn't worth the extra five."

"That is a matter of opinion. I have not got 15,000."

"No, but you can get it. I give you two hours. After that, Rossana will send a certain letter, containing all she knows and has heard. She didn't only lie on her back here, you know. Also, I'll be after you, and if the police catch you first, you'll be lucky."

"Perhaps we could reduce the price, and make the difference your share in a partnership with me, Mr. Regan. I must confess, your ability and tenacity have impressed me —"

"Nothing doing. In the first place, I couldn't trust you an inch, and anyway, I don't like drug-smuggling. Fifteen thousand, and you have two hours to get it. Starting now."

"You leave me no alternative." He stood up and started to go. Then he turned round and spat. "But you will regret it!"

"Beat it before I lose my temper," I said lazily. He scuttled out, and I sat and thought. We didn't have much on him, and if he realised it we could be in an awkward position. Still, the bluff looked as if it would work. There was nothing to do but wait. I helped myself to his whisky and a cigar and settled down with one of his books.

This man collected books — but what books! I was still looking bug-eyed at the pictures in one called "Felicia", after half an hour. And that was a mistake, because when I looked up, there was a little man looking at me. And I was looking down a pistol barrel.

"Mr. Regan," he said. "You are under arrest. Would you care to accompany me?"

"No," I said, but I stood up quietly anyway. "Perhaps we could come to an agreement. I can get you a bigger fish for a price."

"Ignore him," said a voice from the French windows. It was Rossana also with a gun. "The bigger fish will return shortly anyway."

"Hell," I said. "Do you always turn up like this? Package this guy and we'll leave in 90 minutes."

"I fear you are mistaken," said

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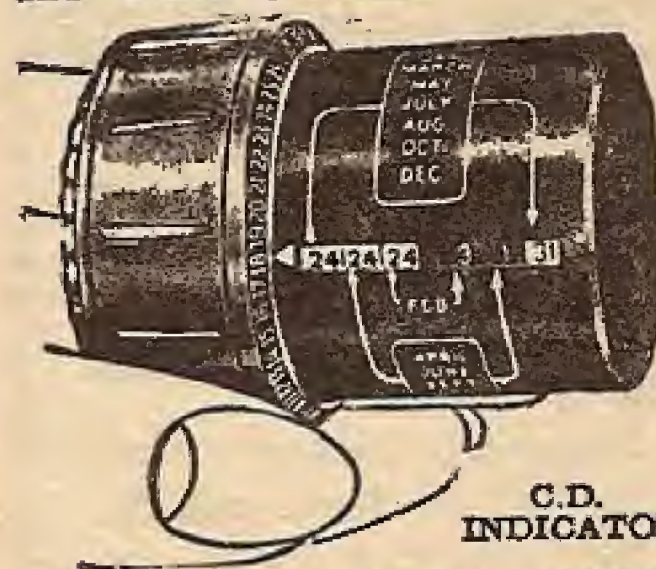
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the little man. "First, we have had an anonymous telephone call that a Mr. Regan, wanted in France, and a smuggler and murderer, would be found here. I feel it was Botticelli. Second, Mr. Regan, allow me to present Signorina Franciosa, who is an agent of Interpol, but currently working with us."

"I have not decided what to do with you, Mr. Regan," said the immaculate little man. He sat on the other side of a scarred and inkstained desk in a musty little room in a provincial police station. Outside the Italian summer heat was making me feel pretty uncomfortable. "We have so much we could do. You are wanted in France as well as here, and I am sure both countries could find a lot of pleasure in extracting more information from you. Enough to keep you out of trouble for a long time."

"Lay off that," I said. "I'm not one of your cruddy countrymen that you can beat convictions out of."

"I don't think your country would object," he said. "I recall that you are not liked there either."

We both thought that over for a while, and decided he was right. "Stop playing cat and mouse," I said. "What're you going to do?"

"Alas, Mr. Regan, it is not what I want to do." Here it comes, I thought, the this-hurts-me-more-than-it-hurts-you jazz. "I have been instructed to offer you another way of paying your debt to society than the obvious one. You would be interested, of course?"

Hell, he's not a hypocrite after all, I thought, and nodded.

"You are really very small fry, and it is felt that you are not completely unreclaimable. Also, you have talents which could be of use. Botticelli, your employer in that disastrous drug smuggling episode is the main concern. In return for him, Interpol offers you a small sum of money to get out of the country. Provided you do not return without an invitation."

"And my status with Interpol?"

"None. It is thought that you would work better with unofficial freedom."

"And be less embarrassing if anything goes wrong?"

He ignored that. "What is your decision, Mr. Regan?"

What would you think it would be?

So there I was on a plane headed toward Tangier, and with a passport, of all things. My agent companion was next to me. She was looking cool and beautiful, as usual.

"How come you're so beautiful?" I said.

"Please remember ours is a business arrangement. Save your energy."

"You're always telling me that, Rossana," I said. "I've been saving energy since the first time I saw you. Then I have you on a promise, and what happens? You turn out to be a lady cop and you nail me. And you haven't paid up on that promise."

"The rat-trap owes nothing to the rat, Mr. Regan. If we must

talk, shall we talk business? Repeat your instructions to me."

"For about the hundredth time, we know that Botticelli is in Tangier. He knows I have a score to settle with him. I walk around asking for him and making myself obvious, and when he comes to get me, I nail him."

"If he doesn't nail you first."

"Yeah. An obvious flaw."

"Only in your opinion. I think it would be a perfect ending."

"Darling, can I kiss you?" I said sarcastically. She sneered at me and turned away, so I picked up a magazine out of the rack and looked at it. I read about five lines and then discovered it was in a language I didn't understand, so I put it back. I twiddled my thumbs.

"Is something making the brave Mr. Regan nervous?" Rossana asked.

"Only you," I said. "Let's talk just to kill time." Then I wished I hadn't said kill. It brought back unpleasant thoughts.

"I will only discuss business with you."

"Then tell me more about our plans. Reassure me."

"We have one contact. He will find us later. He is an unpleasant man, but one does not choose one's allies in employment like this." She looked at me significantly. "He is independently rich and very much the playboy. Debauched."

"And he does this just for kicks? Efficient?"

"Reputedly, but I doubt it."

If I can get some money somewhere, I thought, he won't stop my get-away.

"And remember, we are supposed to be man and wife, and I will be with you continuously." I leered. "And if you attempt to leave without fulfilling your bargain, I will shoot you, but not dead." Having delivered this she imitated my leer at me.

Pleasant dreams, I said to myself and settled down to pretend to nap.

When the time came to find a taxi at the airport we had no trouble. The driver tossed our bags on and we sat back. I looked around and started to figure angles for a quick goodbye.

I began to feel better, so I gave Rossana a cigarette, just to show her in advance there were no hard feelings. As I thumbed my lighter the driver handed back a page out of a notebook. It had one word on it: Interpol. Rossana glanced at it, lit it from my lighter, and lit our cigarettes. I felt worse.

"Well?" asked Rossana.

"No news, signora," said the driver. "Call me Jean-Jean. The ground has been laid for the signore Regan." His imagery did nothing to cheer me up. "The rumor of his arrival and its cause has been circulated. Do you not like my vehicle?" He stuck his foot down to show us how good it was, and narrowly missed murdering 20 pedestrians. Birdbrain, I thought.

We did the rest of the trip rocking backwards and forwards in our seats as he tramped on the brakes

and the gas alternately. At last we stopped and I opened my eyes. "Your hotel," he said. "Please do me the honor of dining with me tonight. I shall pick you up. The signore Regan could be continuing his investigations in the meantime. Now I must return the vehicle. The owner may have missed it." And he gunned the car into the traffic and nearly took the remaining six months off the life of an antiquated Citroen.

"Mad," said Rossana, as the doorman recovered from his surprise and picked up our bags.

I started my investigation. "Know of a man called Botticelli?" I asked the doorman.

"Non," he said, and only added, "M'sieu" after I slipped him a bill. When he saw the size of it, he wished he hadn't.

Rossana and I dropped the bags in our honeymoon suite and went out.

The afternoon tour produced no information, but plenty of kicks if you're an alcoholic. If I'm not now, it wasn't for lack of trying that day. We had to cover as much territory as possible, so it was down with one drink in each place and a fast gallop to the next. Rossana swapped onto tonic water halfway, but I had to face the music. Finally, when I'd reached my limit and she was visiting more powder rooms than bars, we gave up and went home to recover. She slumped down on the bed and didn't object when I lay down beside her. Even after a cold shower I didn't have enough energy left to give her anything to object to.

The haze cleared by early evening and we got up and dressed for dinner. By the time we were finished dressing I'd seen enough to make me wish it really was a honeymoon. She caught the look and said "Shall we wait in the lounge?"

Twice sobered, I followed her down. Jean-Jean was waiting, but instead of being a taxi-driver he was a dandified man-about-town, cleaned, polished and lightly oiled. As well as the new clothes, he'd put on some vicious wrinkles round his eyes. They didn't go with the rest of his face. He looked at Rossana, mentally stripped her, filed what he saw away for future reference, dressed her again, and smiled.

"You are to be congratulated on your beauty," he said. "You are a lucky man, Signore Regan."

"She has her faults," I said. "But thank you." He ushered us out to his car — a Lago-Talbot about 30 feet long. We all sat in the back and I wondered if we'd need megaphones to talk to each other, while Jean-Jean made the trip to the chauffeur and told him where to go.

"This is my favorite spot," he explained. "Entertainment which cannot be matched anywhere else in the world is available. Only a few are allowed to enjoy it, even in Tangier. It is very exclusive." Rossana prepared for the worst. Me, the best.

The Lago-Talbot glided to a halt in an unlit side street and we got

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out. Jean-Jean did a code knock on an unmarked door, and a slit opened.

"This is the dining room," said Jean-Jean. "The gaming room is on your left. The inner sanctum is ahead. Come."

"The floor-show," said Jean-Jean, and pointed his finger through the mesh curtains on the other side of the table. He was already absorbed in it.

It was a symbolic ballet of the seven veils danced by a beautiful small redhead and a giant Ethiopian, who was taking the veils off her. They danced round a circular velvet bed in the middle of the dance floor; she ran, but never fast enough to escape. He pursued, but never fast enough to grab all the veils at once.

"She is a Berber, that is why her skin is pale and the hair red," hissed Jean-Jean, without looking away. The Ethiopian finally managed to get the last veil off as he caught her . . .

The lights faded into almost impenetrable dimness and I dragged my eyes away — Rossana managed it a second later and forced her face into a coldly bored look. Jean-Jean was still staring fixedly when another penguin came in with a menu.

We ordered and Jean-Jean passed the menu to let us choose our liqueurs. Below the list of liqueurs and cigars were a bunch of names — Lisette, Marlene, and so on. He took it back, drew a ring round "Marie" and handed it to a passing penguin with the order.

Marie turned up with the liqueurs, a box of cigars, stockings, high-heeled shoes and not much else. We filled the little glasses, selected our cigars and looked at her. Rossana drained her glass and said, "Excuse me, I need fresh air. Would you accompany me, Dick?"

Jean-Jean said "There is no —" and looked hurt and disappointed. "Well, if you insist, wait for me in the gaming room. I shall find you later. Please feel free to use my credit there." And he slipped an arm round Marie.

I looked politely disappointed, which was much less than I felt, and escorted Rossana out. The curtains closed behind us, cutting off Marie's giggle in mid-scream.

I made free use of the credit, and won a bit, even after paying back. Rossana had morals, and wouldn't. She lost a pile. That's justice for you. We idled away a few hours, had a few dances and drinks, and she got more and more impatient. At last we got a note saying "called away urgently. Apologies. Jean-Jean." We apologised too, and left.

Conveniently, there was a taxi at the door. We got in, and he took off, no directions, nothing.

"That man has a genius for organisation," I said. "Among other things . . ." Rossana gave me a strained look. The taxi driver said nothing. We hurtled round back streets and alleys and finally pulled up. The driver pointed to a door, said: "Knock three times at five second intervals," let us out and left at high speed.

I knocked, feeling a bit like a spy in a cheap thriller, the door

opened and we went into a darkened vestibule. Another door was open into a dimly lit room. Obviously we were meant to go in. As we did, the door shut and the lights came on.

Botticelli sat facing us!

"Good evening, Mr. Regan and Rossana. Please do not move, as my valet — Amedeo, you remember — will shoot if you do." I looked over my shoulder and down the barrel of a gun. "Please separate so that I may tie you up, Mr. Regan, sit in that chair." He moved over to Rossana, and pushed her wrists behind her. She kicked at his shins. Without taking his eyes off me, Amedeo glided over and slugged her under the ear. Botticelli rubbed his shin, murmured "Grazie, Amedeo," and tied her hands and feet. Then he came over to me.

Amedeo was an expert. He hit hard enough to hurt, but not to damage. Just for a change, he held my head back by the hair and slapped my windpipe with his gun barrel. I was beginning to think it would be a long, painful process. When I wasn't so busy fighting for air that I could think.

"Stop!" said a calm voice at the door.

"Jean-Jean!" said Rossana.

I laboriously lifted my head and looked. It was Jean-Jean all right, complete with four Arabs and a tommy gun. I tried to speak, but couldn't. Not even a smile.

"I have looked forward to meeting you, Botticelli," he said. "Business rivals are always pleasant to meet — once. Besides, you almost managed to interrupt one of my drug shipments. You know of a leak in my organisation. You will tell me soon."

Now I knew why he was independently wealthy. "I would prefer you didn't tell me at once. My Tunisians need some exercise."

"But first, we will tie up the loose ends," and he pointed to Amedeo. One of the Tunisians slipped behind him, grabbed his face and eased a knife down inside his ribcage. He collapsed without a sound.

"And now you, Dick Regan. Your usefulness as a decoy is ended. "Knock him out," he finished in French.

The last thing I felt was the thud on the back of my neck.

* * *

Slowly, I began to hear a gentle purring and I forced myself to keep my eyes shut. Then I felt the cushions and the movement, and I knew I was in a car. I was still tied up, so I stayed slumped and tried to clear my brain.

We stopped and somebody said something, and was answered, in an un-understandable language. Then I was pushed behind the wheel, and one set of slippered feet pattered away, while my hands were being untied. I eased my eyes open as he started on my feet, and as soon as they were free I brought my knee up as hard as I could. His head made a satisfyingly crunchy sound as it hit the underside of the windscreen ledge. I dragged him inside, found his pistol, and sat back to recover.

Very soon another car touched

bumpers with us from behind, and started to nudge us toward the cliff edge. So that was the trick — push me over a cliff and make it look like an accident. I would sort that out immediately. I ignored the excited jabber from behind, and when my remaining captor stuck his head at the window to see what had happened, I poked him in the teeth with the pistol barrel.

"Speak English - Francais?" I asked.

"Francais," he said thickly, spitting out a tooth.

I hit him across the bridge of the nose and got out and frisked him while he was still dazed. "Good," I said in French. "Escort me to where we came from," and motioned him into the rear car.

I recognised the street as he turned into it, and when he slowed down I slugged him, grabbed the wheel, and turned the ignition off.

Rossana was still there and all right. The Tunisians were dragging at the last couple of reefers and eyeing her. Some muffled moans were filtering out from the other room. The Tunisians stamped their butts and jabbered away for a while in their own language, then broke into their labored French.

"I feel feverish," said one.

"I know what you need." They spoke flatly, obviously for Rossana's benefit, so that she could guess what was coming.

"A glass of water would do." Playing cat and mouse.

"No water is available. The hashish was showing in their eyes. They turned to Rossana: "Take off your clothes."

"Her hands are tied."

One moved over and cut her hands apart. "Take off your clothes." Rossana didn't move. I got ready to move in. The Tunisian grabbed her neckline and tore her dress off. I took a bead on him.

"I told you not to touch her. She is mine," said Jean-Jean from the other doorway.

The Tunisians turned and stared with their crazed eyes. Jean-Jean strolled over to Rossana. "You are more beautiful than I had imagined," he said. They were the last words he spoke. One Tunisian calmly shot him at the base of the spine. Before Jean-Jean's body hit the floor my pistol recoiled twice. Both Arabs shuddered and died. Rossana fainted.

After we'd recuperated for a day we gave up our suite and flew back to Italy. I was looking forward to continuing our recuperation, but Rossana said she had a report to make, and she'd see me in a couple of days. She did — in the little policeman's office.

"Officially, of course, Mr. Regan, you did not complete your mission satisfactorily," he said. "You left us no information about the organisation. However, the contract will be honored. Here is a ticket to Bolivia and some spending money." He smiled and stood up. "Unofficially, allow me to thank you for intervening to save my fiancée as you did."

Rossana looked inscrutable.

I gaped.

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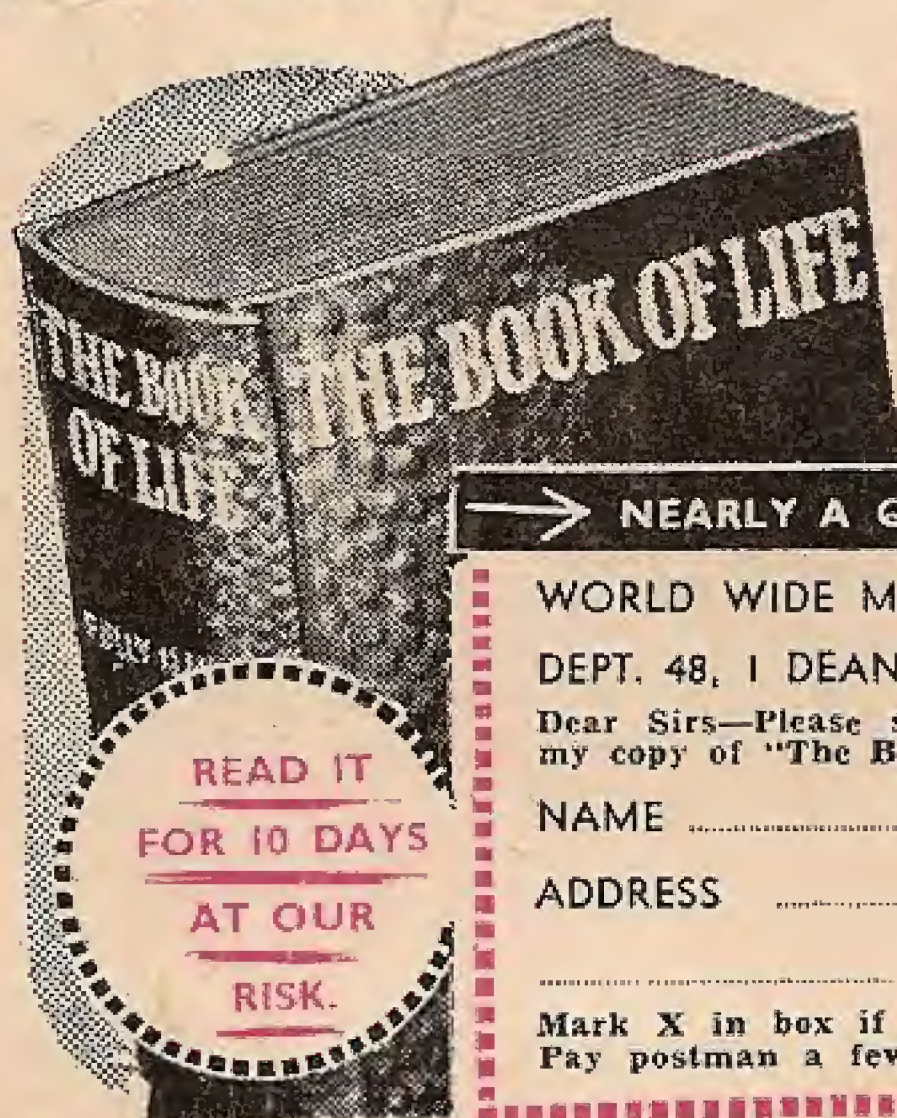
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